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Cover picture A detail from the mural "Our Bread", which is part of the Diego Rivera retrospective exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, reviewed on page 1289

A vision of Dutchness

Jonathan Israel

SIMON SCHAMA
The Embarrassment of Riches: An interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age 698pp. Collins. £19.95.
000217801X

Simon Schama's remarkable new study of Dutch culture and society during the seventeenth century has already received a degree of attention such as is bestowed on only the merest handful of historical works. Like his earlier book *Patriots and Liberators* (1977), a study of the revolutionary movements in the Netherlands between 1780 and 1813, *The Embarrassment of Riches* has been greeted with a vast fanfare of admiring reviews in American, British, Dutch and other newspapers and magazines. The one or two specialist voices which have expressed reservations, as well as measured praise, have been swamped by a deluge of often sparsely informed but effusive reviews by non-historians and historians of places and periods remote from seventeenth-century Holland.

This chorus cannot simply be dismissed as altogether beside the point. This book is an event in historical studies and Schama is a historian of rare standing and exceptional qualities. Although not all readers will find his style to be quite that model of elegance which some of the reviewers claim it is, he writes with immense verve and has an undoubted ability to bring alive what was one of the most creative and original phases in the history of European civilization. The altogether extraordinary society which he discusses is, moreover, one about which the reading and art-loving public already has an unusually vivid perception, thanks to the unique richness of seventeenth-century Dutch genre, landscape, townscape, marine and still-life painting.

Schama's book is not about Dutch art and high culture as such but rather Dutch social culture—attitudes, habits, customs and idiosyncrasies. His object is to capture the essence of "Dutchness", the collective notions held by the Dutch about themselves and others, and their surroundings, and, perhaps most of all, what he terms the "moral geography" of the seventeenth-century Dutch. To explore these phenomena, he makes use of a vast range of materials and sources, but, most extensively, of Dutch art. This he employs as a historical



Jan Steen's "La Ribaude" ("The Disreputable Woman") is reproduced from one of the 314 illustrations in the book reviewed here.

document in a more confident and skilful way than any historian before him, though at times his brilliant descriptions of Dutch eating and drinking customs, and love of the exotic and erotic, tend to excite the reader's imagination and senses more than his intellect. If Schama writes with a touch too much flamboyance, there is no denying that this is a very clever, readable and stimulating book.

Since art and literature in its widest sense are his primary sources, Schama has devoted much thought to how historians might best utilize these as evidence. In the main, he avoids the pitfalls of "iconographic overkill", whereby practically every broomstick, parrot and bowl of fruit becomes a symbol of something else.

At the heart of the whole enterprise is the evidence of the mass of Dutch painters and writers, of the typical rather than of the exceptional. Hence the staggering number of often rather small illustrations in the book. Extensive and mostly intelligent use is made of recent new approaches to seventeenth-century Dutch iconography and emblems, bringing out the full force of tendencies which are not immediately obvious to the modern onlooker, particularly the incessant moralizing and disguised eroticism. At the same time, Schama avoids the pitfalls of "iconographic overkill", whereby practically every broomstick, parrot and bowl of fruit becomes a symbol of something else.

At the heart of the whole enterprise is

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working man and peasant were both better paid and better fed than were their counterparts in the rest of Europe. That is quite true. But rents and taxes were also much higher and the lower-paid were still often desperately poor. Moreover, if the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century was much the most affluent society in Europe it also had a real urban proletariat in a way that Britain and France as yet did not. Most of the population in the large textile towns of Leiden and Haarlem were weavers or other cloth-workers, and outside these towns there was a prodigious mass of wage-earners employed in shipbuilding, sail and rope-making, in the sugar, salt and whale-oil refineries, the Delft potteries and the tobacco workshops. Large numbers were also employed as seamen, in the herring and whale fisheries, as river bargemen and ferry-men. If Holland's urban middle strata were exceptionally extensive compared with those of neighbouring countries, the same is true of the urban lower stratum. It was the peasantry, not the urban poor, who formed a much smaller grouping in Dutch society than in other countries.

This does not mean that Dutch society was seething with class antagonism and rampant exploitation, nor that the distinction between elite and popular culture can be applied in the Dutch context in the same way as with the more aristocratic societies of the day. Not a work purporting to treat the habits, attitudes and values of Dutch society as a whole can hardly be regarded as balanced or comprehensive when it has so little to say about the way of life of the poorer urban wage-earner or, for that matter, the more impoverished sections of Dutch rural society. This lack of differentiation is all the more striking in that what is perhaps the only other major work on Dutch social culture in the seventeenth century, A. Th. van Deursen's *Het kopergeld van de Gouden Eeuw* (1978-9), although definitely non-Marxist in approach, lays particular stress on the polarities in Dutch life-style, and the gulf separating the affluent from the impoverished or near-impooverished.

The fundamental tension which Schama does identify, and which he places at the core of Dutch mentality, was the clash of Calvinist piety allied to humanist moralizing, on the one hand, and the rising tide of materialism, conspicuous display and permissiveness on the other. This tension generated a ceaseless *Kulturkampf* which, according to Schama, was

the key factor determining the contours of Dutch attitudes and culture. Every aspect of life was permeated by a mighty counterpoint which set church and respectable home against tavern and brothel, diligence and discipline against ease and indulgence in smoking and drinking, austerity against extravagance, self-denial against sensuality. Foreign observers noted that Dutch housewives were more chaste than elsewhere, but that at the same time, prostitution and female promiscuity were more prevalent.

But the worrying aspect of Schama's approach here is that for the most part he fails to place the religious and theological preoccupations of the seventeenth-century Dutch in any sort of historical context. There is so much emphasis on the dictates of Calvinism as a force aspiring to dominance over society that one might easily fail to realize while reading this book that those who were even nominally Calvinists constituted only a minority of the populace. The Calvinists were only one of three large religious blocks making up Dutch society, the other two being the Catholics, and a vast army of dissenters and sectaries, especially Mennonites, Arminians, Lutherans, Socinians, Jews, anti-Church collegians and deists. In no other country in sixteenth or seventeenth-century Europe did the dominant church party fail to such a degree to capture the minds of, or impose its views on, the populace as a whole. This was decisive for the shaping of Dutch culture. The fact is that Rembrandt, Vermeer, Spinoza, Vondel, Ruyssdael, Grotius and I Jaspers were none of them Calvinists, nor were a hefty proportion of the country's lesser artists and writers. If one does not make clear the extent of Calvinist failure on the political and religious fronts, or the historical reality of a vast and shifting interaction of theological forces, none of which was politically, culturally or socially dominant, then what hope is there of imparting an adequate perspective on Dutch attitudes and the content of Dutch culture?

The real strength of this book lies not in its basic contentions, such as they are, but in the innumerable and often fascinating digressions and subplots. Nowhere else will one find such evocative, informative and masterly small treatises on Dutch diet, feasting, drinking, smoking, marital relations, prostitution, domestic décor, servants, child-care, tulip-fancying and a host of other topics. The classic seventeenth-century Dutch dish, *hasepot*, we learn, in contrast to earlier and less sophisti-

cated stews, combined a range of locally produced meats and vegetables with East Indian spices, Mediterranean fruits and French wine vinegar, while at the same time reconciling abundance to modesty by combining quantity with a vast range of ingredients with an unassuming texture and appearance. Dutch esculence, too, found ways of combining seemliness with display. The cumulative effect is to convince us that the old stereotypes of the Dutch bourgeois as frugal and dull are wrong, that his culture in reality was one of great opulence and variety and that through it all ran a heroic strand which has usually been missed. In all this, Schama is certainly right. Dutch culture was a strongly flavoured concoction in which the Calvinist tendency had a hard time battling against a deeply ingrained love of the exotic and the sumptuous. The hub of the world economy, a great power with a tiny territory, caught in a narrow corner between England, France and Spain – all much greater powers which went to war repeatedly in largely unsuccessful efforts to cut them down to size – the Dutch were a nation whose very survival, let alone its staggering prosperity, always seemed profoundly precarious. It was success achieved against the odds. No wonder Tromp and De Ruyter meant so much to the Dutch man in the street.

Almost any major work of synthesis such as this will have its share of factual errors, but here there are simply too many, albeit mostly of a fairly trivial nature. Schama refers to Leiden being saved from "Alva's Spanish troops" in September 1574, when Alva had left the Netherlands ten months earlier (page 27), to Piet Heyn capturing the Mexican silver fleet in 1629 when it was captured in 1628 (page 238), to Spanish merino wool as essential to the cloth industries of Leiden and Haarlem at a time when it was not (page 251), and to Minne de Belmonte as the "ambassador" of Spain when he was *resident* of Spain at Amsterdam. He also seems unaware that the West India Company "footbolls at Recife and Pernambuco" were in fact one and the same place, and twice alludes to the poet Jan Krol in the context of Calvinist condemnation of worldly display without telling us that he was a Catholic (pages 47 and 332). But one or two of the errors are rather alarming. The statement (page 60) that "during the first century of Dutch freedom, there was but one national synod" is inexplicable, as in fact several national synods were convened during the early years of the Repub-

lic. The sharp contrast drawn between the Amsterdam Exchange Bank, which is held up as a model of probity, and the Amsterdam Bourse, vividly characterized as a "sink of iniquity", is seriously misleading. The Amsterdam stock exchange had its problems with malpractice and fraud, but in general its brokers and insurers, thanks to the watchful eye of the city fathers, were regarded by the international business community of the day as more honest and reliable than their counterparts in such centres as Genoa or London. The relatively strict supervision exercised over the Amsterdam Exchange was one of the main reasons why it succeeded in eclipsing all its rivals for over a century.

One of the major sources of information utilized by Schama is the comments and observations of foreign visitors and residents, and this is as it should be. The Dutch Republic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was an object of unending fascination. But while such bemused and, in the latter case, biased observers as Fynes Morison and Owen Felltham are quoted again and again, some much more penetrating and extensive commentators – even Gregorio Leti, who is arguably the most informative and acute of all – are not mentioned.

But if this is neither a profound work of history nor a comprehensive treatment of its subject, let me conclude by re-emphasizing its more impressive features. It is an immensely compelling book, which brings out, often with rare discernment, the flavour and peculiarity of a host of facets and traits of Dutch culture which other historians and art historians have missed, ignored, or had less of a feel for. In stressing the reality of Dutch national feeling in the seventeenth century, it also acts as a healthy corrective to much other recent work, which has tended to overemphasize the role of local loyalties and sentiment and, in some cases, all but denied that there was such a thing as a Dutch nation. Schama, aware of how much the orderliness and security of Dutch life owed to political institutions and the State, is mercifully free of that tedious habit of disparaging the Republic's governmental machinery as hopelessly archaic, inefficient and unwieldy. Above all, and for this we are all in Simon Schama's debt, no one can read this book without their capacity to enjoy and appreciate Dutch Golden Age art being immensely enriched and enhanced.

Thin Boy and Fat Boy

Roger Williams

RICHARD RHODES
The Making of the Atomic Bomb
886pp. Simon and Schuster. £18.
0671 441337

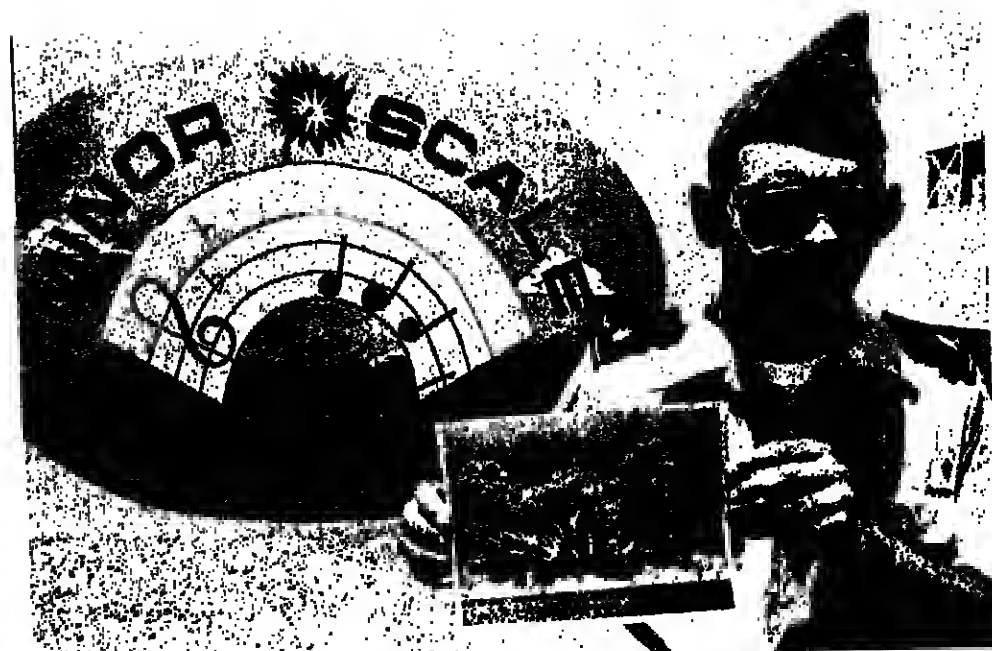
Should any education ever again be regarded as complete which fails to include some study of the development of the first nuclear weapons and their use against Japan? Here are not only most of the ingredients of the best fiction, but also elements no fiction could remotely match. Two of these stand out, above all: the intellectual elegance and sheer excitement of the process of scientific discovery, and the profound banality and ultimately unlimited barbarity of man's political culture. There are to be found as well the moral agony experienced by many of those responsible for unleashing the nuclear genie, together with the detail of what, bearing in mind the circumstances and time scale, could fairly claim to be the most remarkable industrial achievement of all time. And there is too, of course, the unavoidable consideration that forty years later the issues raised by the development and use of nuclear weapons are still those most threatening to us as a civilization, and even, it may be, as a species.

The story has been told many times. There are the official American and British histories, many of the principals wrote books or memoirs, and several academics and professional writers have tackled the whole or part of the subject. Even so, Richard Rhodes's *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* has a great deal to commend it. Its perspective is American, but it treats fully the European origins of nuclear science, and it also manages to relate nuclear developments accurately to the wider world war. It is clear on the physics, balanced on the politics, measured in its judgments and, with few lapses, compulsively readable even when one is familiar with the events described.

Granted that even relatively ordinary events, and even more so the extraordinary ones covered here, are both too complicated and too subjective for any history to be other than partial and selective, the account Rhodes offers is convincing. Undoubtedly, there are many differences of interpretation or judgment between his and earlier accounts. For example, in their official history Hewlett and Anderson state that "The choice of the B29 over the British Lancaster, the only other plane sufficiently large, reflected the disposition to use the bomb against Japan." According to Rhodes, however, "The Air Force was not about to allow a historic new weapon of war to be introduced to the world in a British aircraft...". In a work of almost 800 pages there are also inevitably some blemishes, but they scarcely detract from the impact of the whole.

Rhodes employs the positions of Bohr and Szilard as reference points so that as the tale unfolds, these two scientists emerge as both participants and observers. The technique mostly works, however, partly because each of them did in an unusual way combine in himself these two dimensions, and partly because in such a frightening ocean the reader is only too glad of the relatively reliable beacons these two figures provide.

The epilogue, of some forty pages, is less satisfactory than the main text. It deals with the events of the whole of the first post-war decade and is thus inevitably sketchy; and historical narrative is here made less important than insight and argument. Rhodes has certainly earned the right to comment at length, yet the events of the post-war years, the Cold War, the Soviet atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb and the arms race, are best treated as another story altogether. There are conclusions enough to be drawn from the period to 1945 but Rhodes does not make as much of them as he perhaps could have. So much changed in 1945. No longer was the bomb a secret or the United States Congress pliant, no longer were the Russians on the same side and the British close partners.



A public relations officer for the Defense Nuclear Agency offering journalists a free photograph of "Minor Scale", a simulated nuclear explosion which had taken place earlier in the day in the Alamogordo Desert. It is reproduced from *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb* by Robert Del Tredici (192pp. Harp. Paperback, £9.95. 0 245 54600 0).

The clear goal of winning the war against – in Hitler at least – a truly evil enemy was replaced by the much vaguer need to contain communism that was certainly not as monolithic nor even perhaps as wicked as it was then represented to be. Even in assembling *Thin Boy and Fat Boy* there was, as Rhodes brings out, a kind of innocence, but after the former destroyed Hiroshima and the latter Nagasaki, innocence was gone for ever.

Despite its thoroughness, Rhodes's study still leaves one with questions. A vital one relates to the actual use of the bomb. This has been much debated down the years, the argument often centring on whether or not Japan's surrender might have been compassed by some sort of military demonstration, involving less, or even no, loss of life. A similar debate had

taken place among the scientists before the bomb was used. In his memoirs Truman is unequivocal about his decision to use it: "Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used." Churchill in his memoirs is equally uncompromising: "The historic fact remains, and must be judged in the after-time, that the decision whether or not to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never even an issue." It is a strength of his book that Rhodes makes clear the wider context of this profound decision. In particular the brutalization which by this time the war had brought about on all sides, and the fears, based on clear example, that the Japanese would defend their homeland to the last, thus inflicting further huge Allied casual-

From chaos to absolutism

Jonathan Powis

J. H. M. SALMON
Renaissance and Revolt: Essays in the intellectual and social history of early modern France
306pp. Cambridge University Press. £30.
0 521 32769 5

J. H. M. Salmon's dramatis personae are a mixed bunch: insurgent peasants, washbuckling Gascons, a literary *duc et pair de France* and many more. His themes range equally widely, from popular revolt to the uses of classical erudition. Most of these essays are already in print and these on "Venality and Sedition" and "The Paris Sixteen" require no re-introduction here. But several other pieces have been harder for readers to come by: a substantial comparative essay on Gallicanism and Anglicanism appears for the first time; and the volume opens with a historiographical (and, briefly, autobiographical) overview that one could have wished longer.

Professor Salmon's bent is not for polemic, nor for self-display. The tone of voice, and the cut of mind, are low-key and businesslike. That disposition informs all these essays, however disparate their concerns. But they have more than that in common. Salmon's introduction marks his distance from what he takes to be the distinctive concerns of the *Annales* school: their history is about continuities, his about discontinuities. Even the longest *durée* implies some movement, but Salmon's preference is for the jolting not the glacial. Social protest and revolt point in disper-

ensions in the community. Likewise in intellectual history: with ideas interpreted (in Salmon's phrase) as "signposts and accelerators" in a changing material environment. He does little to analyse how the different facets of change interrelate, and may see scant historical interest in pursuing such problems in general or abstract terms. But it is absolutely clear in what context he sets some of the most striking discontinuities of the early modern period. His widely used textbook of 1975 ends with an account of "the new society" which allegedly emerged from the turmoil of the French religious wars. And to echo his earliest published work, the same turmoil in France generated new sorts of political argument that acted as so many intellectual time-bombs in the English-speaking world. Nowhere in his work has Salmon screened out the bigotry and mayhem of the French religious wars; but he has always been sensitive to the harsh stimulus they gave to new forms of thought and action.

So too with the present collection. The virtual disintegration of the French State after 1560 generated spectacular examples of political self-help (peasant leagues, the urban League). It forced literary men into increasingly dubious readings of the most obviously disabled classical authorities: Tacitus in particular. The vocabulary of Gallicanism became more than ever a means for asserting, or for rescuing, the interest of the State. And by implication the experience of chaos made possible the emergence of a new social and intellectual order which in shorthand we call absolutism.

This is to compress into caricature the argument of essays which carry weight for their

moderation as well as for their range. Much in Salmon's picture is unassailable; for without sixteenth-century disorder, we should be hard put to it to explain the fact, or the character, of the order (such as it was) that the seventeenth century imposed. But that transition is almost as difficult for historians adequately to describe as it must have been for contemporaries to make sense of. More perhaps than Salmon allows, those contemporaries filtered experience through images and language that were old; and because old, authoritative. Voices from a more or less remote past were hard to ignore. Their potency may explain a good deal about sixteenth-century upheavals, and about the strictly relative stability that the Bourbons superimposed thereafter. Salmon's fine study of the troubles in the Vivarais points up the sophistication of rural demands for elected syndics, and of the peace-making ceremonies that followed. But there is nothing especially "startling" in any of this; nor an inevitable conclusion to be drawn that only small-town agitation can have been responsible. In moments of crisis, after all, rural communities had often enough demanded corporate representation; and often enough they invoked the restorative ceremonies of the Church in bringing crisis to an end. So before 1580, and too late for long afterwards, and so, perhaps, with the history of the League.

Here Salmon is especially struck by the readiness of some Catholic militants to appeal to the traditions of Gallicanism. There is certainly a different model of the Gallican Church from that under construction by the royalists around Narbonne. But what, in any of the essays, is the identity of the Gallican

can Catholicism most plausibly represented by the royal person, or by the French Church, or even by the community of the faithful in France? Kings and their more ideologically sound publicists had the answer to that. But there were other answers on offer: the League provided some, just as turbulent clerics had done in earlier generations. Even in the heyday of royalist triumphalism after 1600, those alternatives would not be wholly forgotten. Behind the façade of seventeenth-century order, older assumptions about communal association and Christian fellowship would linger on: as uneasily assimilated to absolutist thinking as interest-groups rooted in locality or social rank would prove to be to the administrative structure of the State.

It seems appropriate that Salmon's final essay takes us into the bayday of royalism under Louis XIV: and that ambiguities (contradictions?) are well to the fore. In the aftermath of the Gascon troubles of the 1660s, the Sun King proved strikingly respectful of local liberties. Sagacious management certainly oiled the mechanisms of absolutism; but Salmon might have said more about the tenacity of institutions and pressure-groups that made such management necessary. The theme of continuity bears on ideas and attitudes as well. Good kingship – Louis's gentle handling of Gascon rights – was not to be interpreted simply as effective kingship. The keeping of trust between king and subjects remained more than a maxim of prudence: a point familiar to Louis as it had been to the activists of the League. It would be rash to assume him more disposed than his Most Christian predecessors to treat the good and the advantageous as identical.

Charlotte Brontë: The Professor

Edited by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten

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American strategic analysis has changed profoundly over the past twenty-five years. During the early 1960s, it was optimistic, positive, and dominated by the example of Munich—opposed that is, to any policy of “appeasement”. Nuclear deterrence was seen as the solution to national-security problems; it offered the prospect of protecting Western interests while avoiding nuclear war, with strategic stability to be maintained through arms control. There was also considerable confidence in crisis management. In the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara claimed that there was no longer any such thing as strategy, only crisis management. Furthermore, it was believed that even if crisis management failed, it ought be possible to limit hostilities. In June 1962, McNamara gave a famous speech in which he appeared to envisage the possibility of a limited nuclear war in which the main target would be the military capabilities of the adversary. A few months earlier, at a NATO meeting in Athens, McNamara had extolled the virtues of American nuclear superiority.

The McNamara of the 1960s, however, is very different from the McNamara of the early 1960s. His book *Blundering Into Disaster* is not a formal repudiation of his earlier thinking, as he does not admit that he once enunciated arguments he now deplores. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern in his personal odyssey of strategic discovery a major change in strategic analysis itself. The works by Morton Halperin and Richard Ned Lebow are manifestations of the same trend, revealing just how much American strategic analysis in the late 1980s is dominated by concerns about a nuclear “Sarajevo”. The fear of appeasement, based on the analogy with Munich, has given way to the fear of war by miscalculation as occurred in July 1914.

There is still a significant strand of continuity, of course, maintained by analysts who emphasize traditional anxieties and espouse traditional recipes. This school, however, has been challenged by those whose major concern is that the United States and the Soviet Union might somehow stumble into war. From this perspective, the national-security establishments of the two superpowers, with their interlocking warning and alert systems and doctrines of nuclear war-fighting, are the problem rather than the solution. It is stressed that one failure of deterrence would be catastrophic, that arms control has not provided the degree of stability anticipated twenty-five years ago, and that crisis management is something which can easily go awry. In short, there has been an upsurge of awareness of the dangers of the current situation and of the consequences of existing trends.

Perhaps the most notable exponent of strategic pessimism is Robert McNamara. The very title of his book summons up the Sarajevo experience, any repetition of which he and other analysts are so anxious to avoid. The first chapter deals with the risk of nuclear war and includes discussion of three crises—Berlin, August 1961; Cuba, October 1962; and the Middle East War, June 1967—in which McNamara participated. His findings are stark:

In no one of the three incidents did either side intend to set in a way that would lead to further conflict.

but on each of the occasions lack of information, misinformation, and misjudgements led to confrontation. And in each of them, as the crisis evolved tensions heightened, emotions rose, and the dangers of irrational decisions increased.

McNamara concludes that the risk of nuclear war today is acceptably high. He also identifies several misperceptions which make the strategic competition between the superpowers unnecessarily dangerous: these include exaggerated assessments of Soviet power, the belief that the United States can regain superiority, and the contention that arms control is rendered worthless by Soviet cheating. Such misperceptions, he claims, have undermined support for arms control and increased the animosity between the superpowers through much of the decade. In turning to the future McNamara rejects President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative as undesirable and nuclear disarmament on the scale outlined by Gorbachev as unrealistic. His alternative is to demand a recognition that nuclear weapons can only be used to deter their use by the adversary. The implication is that the role of nuclear weapons in the American defence posture should be downgraded, a development which requires that NATO adopt a “no first use” posture.

A variation on the no first use arguments, however, is presented very forcefully in Morton Halperin's *Nuclear Fallacy*. Halperin challenges the pervasive assumption of the American national-security establishment that nuclear weapons have considerable utility and can be used to offset shortcomings in conventional forces. After a cursory survey of superpower confrontations, he concludes that “nuclear weapons have never been central to the outcome of a crisis”. Nevertheless, they have been integrated into the organization, doctrines and force structures of the American armed services, largely, he says, because the services regarded them as crucial to the maintenance of organizational health and vitality.

Halperin's major recommendation is that this process be reversed, and that nuclear weapons be stigmatized as devices which can never be used to win wars. This in turn would entail changes in America's nuclear posture, with greater emphasis being placed on survivability, the separation of conventional and nuclear forces, and the need not to threaten Soviet nuclear capabilities. These steps would enhance “crisis stability”. The obvious objection is that they would also undermine the American nuclear guarantee to Western Europe. Halperin, in a colourful but misleading phrase, characterizes this guarantee as a “doomsday machine linked to a roulette wheel”. His prescription is to separate the nuclear and conventional forces of the Alliance, by making NATO's nuclear capabilities invulnerable and placing them under the control of the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe; if they are used at all it should be only for political signalling and not for strictly military purposes. These measures should be accompanied by an even greater downgrading of nuclear weapons in other theatres: “The United States should procure and deploy its forces, develop its war plans, and make its commitments to defend allies on the assumption that nuclear devices do not exist.” Such a development would also make it possible for the United States to develop a more coherent arms control policy. Halperin is essentially demanding a fundamental shift in attitudes and force structures which have developed over many years. If his prescriptions are too ambitious, the book nevertheless succeeds in addressing the issues in an imaginative way. Furthermore, the concern he expresses over “crisis stability” cannot be lightly dismissed.

The same concern animates Richard Ned Lebow, whose book *Nuclear Crisis Management* spells out the dangers of miscalculation, escalation, loss of control and pre-emption, all of which could contribute to the outbreak of nuclear war. Indeed, Lebow demonstrates skilfully how these dangers can interact with each other in ways which contribute to crisis mismanagement. Although none of his arguments derive from work done by Paul Bracken and Bruce Blair on strategic command and control, he adds a new and invaluable layer of understanding by showing how psychological and organizational factors might interact in ways which could cause crises to spiral out of control.

The overall tone of the analysis is alarmist, but this is almost certainly deliberate. Lebow has set out to highlight the dangers inherent in superpower crises and to counter those who see the Cuban missile crisis as the model for successful crisis management. He has succeeded. Using insights from the July Crisis of 1914 as well as Cuba, he shows how strategic alerts, command and control problems, military rigidity, civilian ignorance of military procedures and “cognitive biases” can all contribute to a management failure—with disastrous consequences. The book is not simply about the pitfalls to be avoided, however. The concluding chapter offers constructive recommendations for minimizing crisis instability. Perhaps the most important point Lebow makes is that crisis management is inherently fallible and that greater emphasis needs to be placed on crisis prevention.

If the thought of the Sarajevo analogy sensitizes policy-makers in Moscow and Washington to the danger of inadvertent war then it will be of immense value. But an obsession with 1914 as the model to be avoided will lead to assessments which are as ahistorical as those of the previous generation of strategists who were blinded by the Munich analogy. There is already a tendency in current American analysis to advocate shifts which could provoke the kind of instabilities which have been avoided for much of the post-war period. This is true of two very different responses to the concern over a nuclear Sarajevo. One response, associated largely with McNamara, has been to advocate a no-first-use posture for NATO. The other solution has been to seek revolutionary means to escape from the nuclear predicament: President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, based on his vision of a world in which strategic defences are dominant, is the most obvious example. It is significant that McNamara, Halperin and Lebow are all critical of SDI. At the same time, it is clear that McNamara and Halperin—in contrast to Lebow, who offers a more reformist and more realistic approach—also want changes in posture and doctrine which, in different ways, are as radical as those envisaged by President Reagan.

From a European perspective, the attempt to downgrade nuclear weapons—especially when accompanied by the agreement to eliminate intermediate nuclear forces in Europe—could portend the removal of the American nuclear guarantee, and therefore create a new set of instabilities. Although Halperin explicitly disavows this, the kind of analysis which he presents inevitably arouses such fears—It is only a small step from arguing that nuclear weapons have very limited political utility to the contention that they have no utility. It is in this connection that *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* by Richard K. Betts is particularly welcome; not only is it an incisive analysis in its own right, but it is also an important counterweight to those who insist on the primacy of the Sarajevo model. Betts's major concern is the extent to which the strategic nuclear balance as opposed to the balance of interests (ie, who has most at stake) determines the outcome of Soviet-American crises. In considering this, he examines in some detail a number of nuclear crises, ranging from low-risk cases such as Korea and Indo-China to higher-risk cases such as Berlin 1961, the Cuban missile crisis and the 1973 Middle East crisis. His conclusions are cautious, subtle and immensely valuable. He makes it clear that even during the golden age of American nuclear superiority US decision-makers were highly cognizant of the devastation that would be inflicted on American society in the event of a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. At the same time he acknowledges that while the balance of interests might have been the crucial consideration for US policy-makers, the nuclear disadvantage weighed more heavily with the Soviet leaders. Consequently, the emergence of strategic parity—which is superbly analysed in the book—has added a new element of uncertainty about the efficacy of nuclear threats. Betts's conclusion, however, is that there is a future for nuclear coercion, although only where significant American interests are involved. Lebow's analysis also reflects this—albeit with more explicit attention to the attendant dangers. In denying that there is a future, Halperin and McNamara seem to be plunging in with blind thinking.

On the state of America

Zachary Leader

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On the night of President Reagan's inaugural, Mrs Reagan placed a phone call to one of her oldest friends. Here is how Gore Vidal, reviewing a back biography of the presidential couple (the source of the anecdote), recounts their conversation:

“Oh Nancy, you aren't a movie star now, not the biggest movie star. You're the star of the whole world. The biggest star of all.” To which Nancy answered, “Yes, I know, and it scares me to death.” To which, halfway around the world, at Windsor Castle, an erect small woman of a certain age somewhat less than that of Nancy is heard to mutter, “What is all this shit?”

We should be grateful to the Republicans for offering Vidal such targets. They produced Nixon, after all, with his “eery and touching propensity to fuck up”, the source of such wonderful “odd bursts of candor” as that Eisenhower was complex and devious “in the best sense of those words”. Then there's Eisenhower himself, “reading a speech with his usual sense of discovery”; or Kissinger, “something the burglar uses to jimmy a lock”; or Pat Robertson, who welcomed the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 as the longed-for Armageddon: “The whole thing is in place now, it can happen any time . . . But by fall, undoubtedly something like this will happen which will fulfill Ezekiel.” Before Robertson, the Evangelical-Republican wing was led by the now much-burdened Jerry Falwell. (Is there nothing to be said for Falwell, Vidal was once asked? “Well”, he deliberated. “I like his

choir. I like his fat little smile . . .”) Here are Vidal's interpolated comments on a 1981 interview Falwell gave to the *Los Angeles Times*:

We believe that Russia, because of her need for oil—and she's running out now [no, she's not, Jerry]—is going to move in the Middle East, and particularly Israel because of their hatred of the Jew [so where's the oil there, Jerry?] and that it is at that time when all hell will break out. And it is at that time when I believe there will be some nuclear holocaust on this earth.

According to Vidal, in the title piece to *Armageddon?: Essays 1983-1987*, Reagan himself believes this scenario. In 1971, when still Governor of California, Reagan attended a dinner where he sat next to the president of the state senate, James Mills. Mills published an account of their conversation, in which Reagan spoke of Libya's turn to the left as “a sign that the day of Armageddon isn't far off”. Reagan then told Mills: “All of the other prophecies that had to be fulfilled before Armageddon have come to pass. In the thirty-eight chapter of Ezekiel it says God will take the children of Israel from among the heathen when they'd been scattered and will gather them again in the promised land. That has finally come about after 2,000 years. For the first time ever, everything is in place for the battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ.” Reagan then goes on to identify Russia as Gog, “the nation that will lead all the other powers of darkness . . . against Israel”. “It can't be too long now,” Reagan told Mills, “Ezekiel says that fire and brimstone will be rained upon the enemies of God's people. That must mean they will be destroyed by nuclear weapons.”

The conversation with Mills was not, it seems, a temporary aberration. During the 1980 presidential campaign Reagan told the adulterous Jim Bakker, of the PTL network, “we may be the generation that sees Armageddon”; and in the same year the *New York Times* quoted Reagan as calling Israel “the only stable democracy we can rely on as a spot where Armageddon would come”.

“Apparently, the God of Ezekiel has a thing about stable democratic elections prior to sorting out the Elect”, notes Vidal. Views like these, Vidal claims, underlie Reagan's notorious 1983 description of the Soviet Union as “the focus of evil in the modern world”. They also lead Vidal to conclude that Reagan will never sign an arms deal with the Soviet Union: “To stop the arms race would be to give the victory to Gog.” But surely, improbable as it sounds, Vidal overestimates the President, for whom the long view has never been much of a consideration. Less dubious is his assertion that the millennialists have political clout, and that they use it to demonize the Soviet Union, thus helping to ensure that “over sixty per cent of the government's income is wasted on ‘defence’”.

Part of what exercises Vidal about the loony right—in addition to the trifling matter of world destruction—is its relation to Israel. And at this point, “Vidalgate”—Gore Vidal's bitter quarrel with the Jewish-American right—alouds into view. Because of Israel, he claims, the *Commentary* gang has bedded down with the moral majority. “We are constrained to take our allies where and how we find them”, Vidal quotes Irving Kristol as admitting. The result, especially since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, is that anyone who calls the new alliance into question, or seeks to debate the issues that gave it birth, is in danger of being labelled anti-semitic. After 1982, “a wide range of Americans were . . . exuberantly defamed, including myself”. But the question of defamation is complicated in Vidal's case, and his reprinting here of the 1986 *Nation* article that set off the controversy suggests that he wants it discussed.

Armageddon? is divided into sections. Part One contains essays on a range of topics—politics, aviation, Hollywood—each of which contains an element of autobiography. The essays are arranged chronologically, from an opening piece on the Washington of Vidal's childhood, to a concluding one about the atheist where he now lives in Rome. Part Two is more

exclusively literary, consisting of essays on James, Howells, Logan Pearsall Smith, Paul Bowles, Italo Calvino and Anthony Burgess. “A Cheerful Response”, from Part One, is Vidal's re-titling of the 1986 *Nation* piece, “The Empire Lovers Strike Back”, and it is accompanied by an uncharacteristically sycophantic “analysis” of the controversy by Andrew Kopkind (“Vidal is a polymath of awesome range and versatility”, etc). The original article provoked a storm of semi-orchestrated protest from Jews and others in the United States, and since its publication, Vidal admits in a laconic footnote to the reprint, “I am now regularly attacked by Israel Firsters as an anti-semitic (usually with an adjective like ‘virulent’ or ‘frenzied’). I have not yet got around to responding.”

“A Cheerful Response” is short and savage. It goes straight for the jugular in a manner calculated to offend. Its immediate targets are Norman Podhoretz and his wife, Midge Decker, “the Lunta of the right wing (Israeli Fifth Column Division)”. The anger which fuels the article is only in part a product of the Podhoretzes' views on defence and foreign policy; it also derives from what Vidal has called “neo-con homophobia”. In 1980, Decker published an article in *Commentary* entitled “The Boys on the Beach”. In this article she propounded the theory that there is a suicidal impulse at work in homosexual (Vidal sometimes prefers “homosexualist”) promiscuity. Vidal's response at the time was an article entitled “Some Jews and the Gays” (reprinted as the title essay to the 1982 collection, *Pink Triangle and Yellow Star*). The essay identifies Decker as belonging to “a group of New York Jewish publicists” who

know that should the bad times return, the Jews would be singled out yet again. Meanwhile, like so many Max Naumanns (Naumann was a German Jew who embraced Nazism), the new class passionately supports our ruling class—from the Chase Manhattan Bank to the Pentagon to the Op-Ed page of *The Wall Street Journal*—while holding in contempt what they think our rulers hold in contempt: faggots, blacks . . . and the poor.

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Through "Pink Triangle and Yellow Star" argues for an alliance of Jews and gays - "Jews and homosexuals are in the same fragile boat, and one would have to be pretty obtuse not to see the common danger" - it also, in places, identifies Jewish homophobia as something deeper and older than mere non-conservative expedience ("holding in fierce contempt what they think our rulers hold in contempt"). For Vidal also believes that Jews are culturally predisposed to homophobia; that homophobia is a natural outgrowth of "the Mosaic paradigm". This is a theory most eloquently propounded by Vidal's best-known fictional creation, Myra Breckinridge, whose adventures, and those of her alter ego, Myron, have been newly reissued - bound together, as it were - in a single volume. "For the Jew", declares Myra,

the family is everything; if it had not been, that religion which they so cherish (but happily do not practice) would have long since ended and with it their baldfish sense of identity. As a result the Jew floods literally demoralizing the normal human drive toward promiscuity. Also, the Old Testament injunction not to look upon the father's nakedness is the core of a puritanism which finds imbecile the thought that the male in himself might possess an intrinsic attractiveness, either aesthetically or sexually. In fact, they hate the male body and ritually tear the penis in order to render the man so deformed that his sex is unuseful. It is, all in all, a religion even more dreadful than Christianity.

The charge that "A Cheerful Response" is antisemitic rests on what Podhoretz calls "the resurrection of the two classic theories of anti-semitism - the Jew as alien and the Jew as the conspiratorial manipulator of malign powers dangerous to everyone else". When in 1960 Podhoretz admitted to Vidal that the American Civil War was to him "as remote and irrelevant as the Wars of the Roses", Vidal concluded that Podhoretz "was not planning to become an assimilated American, to use the old-fashioned terminology; but rather, his first loyalty would always be to Israel". When Dexter "goonily" defends American imperialism on the grounds that much of its conquered territory would come under democratic rule, Vidal nightly lambasts her: "We stole other people's land. We murdered many of the inhabitants. We imposed our religion - and rule - on the survivors. General Grant was ashamed of what we did in Mexico, and so am I. Mark Twain was ashamed of what we did in the Philippines, and so am I." That Dexter is not ashamed, writes Vidal, in a passage singled out by his critics, is because "in the Middle East another predatory people is busy stealing other people's land in the name of an alien ideology. She is a propagandist for these predators."

Though "people" here means "Israelis" rather than "Jews" (the Israelis being "another predatory people" like the American imperialists at the turn of the century), this is still a trifle offensive. For Vidal is clearly aware of - enjoys - the note of menace his phrases echo. Like his admirer Christopher Hitchens, writing recently (October 16-22) in the TLS about a comparably "hard-nosed" idiom (that of John Gregory Dunne in his novel *The Red White and Blue*), I find "the sheer relish and pungency" of such writing unsettling. "Since spades may not be called spades in freedom's land, let me spell it all out," continues Vidal. Well yes, but not if you want also to call blacks spades (which is part of the joke, after all). The Vidal of "A Cheerful Response" is past caring: he means to speak the truth as he sees it - about Israeli aggression, about the power and potential unpopularity of the Israel lobby ("a small number of American Jews") - but he also means to wound. For all its air of the "naughty prank" (Kopinski's phrase), "A Cheerful Response" is fuelled by anger and a desire for revenge, emotions which breed their own polemical unscrupulousness.

Elsewhere, the volume is a treat, full of the many virtues, including a controlled and perceptive make-up, characteristic of previous collections. *Empire*, on the other hand, Vidal's latest massive instalment of national biography ("Of course I like my country", he tells Dexter in "A Cheerful Response", "After all, I'm its current biographer") is a relative disappointment, at least in comparison to *Lincoln*, its immediate predecessor. *Empire* is the fifth of Vidal's cycle of American historical novels. The period it covers is 1893-1906, years in

which the United States underwent a crucial shift from Republic to Empire. The novel opens with news of victory in the Spanish-American War. After a mere ten weeks of sporadic fighting the United States had acquired an immense new empire, one which would eventually include Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, Panama, the Dominican Republic and the Philippines. This was also the period, Vidal suggests, when the United States ceased to be governed by those who "knew"; that is, by a cultured patriciate whose passing the novel laments, even while registering its failings. "Our turn-of-the-century imperialists", Vidal writes in *Armageddon?*, "may have been wrong, and I think they were. But they were intelligent men with a plan, and the plan worked."

As in earlier volumes of the cycle - *Washington DC* (1967), *Burr* (1973), *1876* (1976, of course), and *Lincoln* (1984) - *Empire* mixes fictional with historical figures. The central fictional characters in this case are Caroline Sanford and her half-brother Blaise, who are related to people, fictional as well as historical, from earlier novels. The most important of the figures from history are John Hay, Ambassador to the Court of St James, Secretary of State to McKinley and Roosevelt, and ex-assistant secretary to Lincoln; Henry Adams; William Randolph Hearst; and Presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt - though there are also appearances from Adams's brother Brooks, author of the Imperialist manifesto *Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895), Henry James, Mark Hanna, Elihu Root, and others, as well as a passing reference to Vidal's grandfather, Thomas Gore, Senator from Oklahoma.

The novel begins, appropriately enough given its period, as Jamesian pastiche. Caroline is twenty, an orphaned American heiress who has lived most of her life in Paris. Like Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* (a nearly perfect work as a novel can be), we learn from *Armageddon?*, she is determined to be free and to see the world; though in Caroline's case it is America rather than Europe she means to discover. Secretary Hay is at first a sort of Mr Touchett, his son Del the fated Ralph. Del's perfunctory demise is something of a joke; but Vidal's witty depiction of the Master himself is deeply respectful, full of a sense of bow formidable and penetrating a social presence James must have been, for all his fantastical sense of speech.

The Jamesian echoes only begin to recede when Caroline joins her brother in America. For it is here that both characters attach themselves to a new and ominous presence in the land: the popular press, source of a power

"no ruler could... exercise". "A young American woman who chose to publish a newspaper was not quite within his grasp", says Hay of James, when he and Caroline meet again in Washington. But having Caroline



resuscitate (by taking down-market) a staid and ailing *Tribune* suits Vidal's purpose admirably, since it helps prevent the novel from splitting into fictive and historical strands. (That Blaise and Caroline dispute their father's will also helps in this regard, by echoing the larger imperial themes of inheritance, legitimacy and deception.) Blaise works for Hearst, who emerges as the most powerful figure in America, electoral setbacks notwithstanding. As Hearst tells Roosevelt at the end of the novel, in one of the best of its several set-piece confrontations: "I made war with Spain and won it. All my doing that was, and none of yours. Ever since then, the country's gone pretty much the way I've intended it to go, and you've gone right along, too, because you had to."

Though Hearst belongs to a rising class, he's no more a democrat than the aged oligarchs he replaces. Democracy has always been something of a pious fiction in Vidal's American novels; nor are his heroes of the old order much concerned with the needs of "the people", American or otherwise. What they are concerned with, and admired for, is intelligence, irony ("I hate irony", Roosevelt is baldly admitting) and knowledge. "They are the fast", Caroline says of Hay, Adams and

their circle at the end of the novel, "Last of what?" a friend asks. "Last - believers." But what it is they believe in, aside from themselves and their interests, is hard for Caroline to put into words. When she admits to Adams that she's always wanted to be part of his circle, what she says is "I wanted to - know" (another of those signifying, Jamesian beatitudes). "That is it", says Adams. "That is all there is, to want to know...". Such an ambition - or distinction - is itself Jamesian. "In a James drama", writes Vidal of *The Golden Bowl*, "not to know is to be the sacrificial lamb... One may or may not like Maggie (I don't like what she does or, indeed, what she is), but the resources that she brings to bear, first to know and then to act are formidable." Hay, Adams and now Caroline are meant to be formidable in just this way. They understand themselves and the world, and enter into history, forward their "plans", without illusion.

What they don't enter into much, however, is fictional life. Too many of the characters in the novel are viewed *ab extra*, as collections of tags and ties. The weakness in characterization may derive from several sources. To begin with, there's the simple fact of how much else Vidal means to do in the novel, how much "knowledge" - about politics, foreign policy, society, fashion, interior decoration, popular music, eating habits - he means to pack in. Then there's the difficult - if also lucrative and laudable - business of addressing the widest audience possible (the American print run of *Empire* was two hundred and fifty thousand copies). Vidal is unlikely to overstate the perceptive powers of the greater American public. Whatever the reason, though, too many of the characters in the novel are perfunctorily drawn. Every time Adams appears we are reminded of his tiny body and wizened face; the characterization of Hay's wife Clara consists of nothing more than reiterated references to her bulk; Theodore Roosevelt is all "tombstone teeth" and meaningless bustle; even Hay remains shadowy, for all the prominence of his "point of view". As for Caroline, she seems assembled rather than embodied; part Isabel Archer, part Maggie Verver, part Madame Marie (even, as others have suggested, part Myra Breckinridge). What is missing from *Empire*, for all its wit and learning, its narrative and expository strength, is precisely that overelusive power, a power of embodiment and suggestion, so finely celebrated in Vidal's literary essays, those on James in particular. Too often we have to be told what's going on within a character. In a different novel, the sort of novel Vidal reads rather than writes, we'd be expected to figure it out for ourselves, to "know".

Reconstruction Klan as intent on restoring traditional black subordination in the South, but mars his account by use of the pejorative terms "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" for the white opposition. He sees the revived 1920s Klan as a product of anxieties and fears over a rapidly changing society, but overstates the role of fundamentalism (as he does with the "Moral Majority" in the 1970s and 80s), with which he wrongly identifies the Campbellites (or Disciples). In his fascination with the Toldana story, he misses the extent of Klan power elsewhere and the degree to which it tore itself apart in practically every part of its empire. Wade's sense of the personal and the dramatic inclines him towards overstatement. As the Stephenson case, ("more than any single factor") is credited for bringing down the 1920s Klan, the fascinating story of the brave young secret agent, Statton Kennedy, is offered as "the single most important factor in preventing a postwar revival" when message and constituency were probably more crucial. Wade is not interested in the questions of the Klan's urban role, why it held to being an essentially reactionary working-class movement, its socio-economic composition, or the psychology of the 1980s. Arguing of its leadership. While always potentially violent, the few thousand wavering recruits of the early 1980s were not "a full-blooded" revival and the possibilities of "sophistication", "technology" and "vigil" do not seem sufficient to promise a future in which the Klan could once again "burgeon".

The mummy's voice

Zinovy Zinik

ALAN BRIEN
Lenin: The novel
703pp. Secker and Warburg. £11.95.
0 346 068 40 0

Right at the beginning of *Lenin: The novel*, the young Lenin, observing his father's body in its coffin, has premonitions of his own funeral: "What I saw could have been a waxwork model of me. Me dressed up, made up, to look like a middle-aged functionary, your typical ennobled civil servant." "A waxwork model" exactly describes how Lenin's embalmed corpse in the Mausoleum looks today. The techniques of mummification were in a rudimentary state at the time of Lenin's death in 1924. (Stalin and the mummified leaders of other Soviet bloc countries - China, Bulgaria and Mongolia - were luckier.) As a result, it is now difficult to say how many of Lenin's original features have been saved for posterity. Spare parts for the mummy are regularly supplied by the Lenin Mausoleum Research Institute in Moscow, the top-secret organization which employs the most sophisticated Soviet embalmer, make-up artists and artificial-limb engineers. During the Second World War the mummy was evacuated to safety beyond the Urals, where it was preserved, coated with ice, and guarded by a special unit like the one deployed at the Mausoleum.

The Egyptian secrecy in which Lenin's corpse is shrouded is reflected, as befits Marxist logic, by the enigma of his spiritual legacy, his biography or, rather, the iconography of his life. Was he one-quarter Jewish? Was he a German spy during the First World War? Was his progressive paralysis caused by syphilis (as the results of the autopsy showed), with his brain shrunk to the size of a child's fist? Was, then, the October Revolution caused by the outbreak of feverish activity characteristic of a syphilitic mind some time before death? What were the relationships between Lenin, his wife Krupskaya and mistress Inessa Armand, apart from, as Alan Brien suggests, Lenin's view of copulation as some sort of Hegelian dialectic? Answers to all these blasphemous questions are firmly kept in the sealed archives of the Lenin Library and in the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Under Khrushchev some of Lenin's administrative memoranda during the first years of the Revolution were published. They showed that he had organized the first corrective labour camps for the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia and also re-introduced censorship. But these revelations were short-lived and

quickly hushed up. Nowadays, public opinion still vacillates between the iconographic Lenin of Soviet school-books, with his banal truisms ("Better less but better", "Cinema is a great art-form", "We will go the other way"), which have become an inexhaustible source for unofficial parody and anecdote; and the image drawn by writers such as Solzhenitsyn, who present Lenin as a paranoid mediocrity bent on destruction.

Unfortunately, Alan Brien is seemingly too modest and too honest in his capacity as Lenin's fictional biographer to attempt either to desecrate the tomb of Lenin's private life, or debunk him as a public figure. Instead, he has chosen to tell his well researched story of Lenin's life as it might have been written by Lenin himself, and to analyse the history of the period through Lenin's eyes. With enviable equanimity and benevolence, the author makes his Lenin keen on self-criticism but not without understanding of his own indispensable historic role in revolution. The result is a predictable metamorphosis of an idealistically minded student of law, bored with life in a provincial town, into a law-maker whose altruism steadily recedes, leaving the reader to take on the weight of boredom. Strangely enough, Brien's literary method, consciously or not, emulates the ideas of the *Sots-Art* movement in the Soviet Union and abroad, whose founders, the artists Komar and Melamid, juxtaposed and collated different manifestations of Soviet reality - without making a moral judgment, letting a Soviet phenomenon speak for itself.

Verisimilitude, however, suffers from the Englishness of Lenin's manner of speech. There is very little here of the notorious clumsiness of Lenin's Russian syntax, his lower tendency to pile up one sentence on another, mixing high and low styles, his proverbial over-indulgence in the prefix "arch-" ("arch-enemy", "arch-reactionary" etc), his fondness for exclamation marks! The Lenin of the novel speaks, rather, in the accents of an English public schoolboy. He refers to Stalin as "Uncle Joe" well before the Second World War and nicknames the famous Russian mathematician Lobachevsky, "Lob"; similar diminutives are applied to his Party comrades.

The impression is strengthened by the way in which, throughout the book, Brien explains each and every thing Russian for the convenience of his English readers. Thus we are informed by artificially introduced explanatory remarks that, for example, the name Stalin means the Man of Steel and that Lenin is the Man from the Lena ("A Siberian river I believe. Full of gold too, they say.") Bearing in mind Lenin's legendary obsession with dic-



Lenin with Stalin at Gorki, August 1922; Stalin was entrusted by the Central Committee with the supervision of Lenin's medical treatment when the latter suffered a series of strokes. The picture is taken from Trotsky: A photographic biography, by David King, with an introduction by Tamara Deutscher and commentary by James Ryan (334pp. Blackwell, £19.50, 0 631 14698 X).

tionaries, this constant appeal to the English reader drives one to the bizarre conclusion that this autobiography was meant to be read in England. Was Lenin an English spy too?

Things are further complicated by the fact that Brien has chosen to shape Lenin's fictional autobiography in the form of a diary. Diaries are not written to be read by outsiders, least of all by foreigners. In fact, this diary could not have been written at all, because the diary is a forbidden literary form for a revolutionary. "Write down as little as possible. Never take notes of anything that might compromise you or your comrades - it is better to forget a detail than to hand it across to the enemy." Lenin copies out, in his diary, this instruction to the underground revolutionary worker, and then goes on to do exactly the opposite, recording for 700 pages, in minute detail, conversations with his comrades, their names and addresses, intrigues inside the Party, revolutionary plans and tactics, the strengths and weaknesses of his ideological opponents. The artificiality of these "diaries" reaches its peak when Brien has to invent ways to enable the hero to keep on writing after suffering two strokes and progressive paralysis. Lenin "dictates" his diary, the diary is written "for him", the words are de-

ciphered from the movements of his mouth.

The reader, in fact, would be better advised to ignore the ambiguities and contradictions of the diary form and view the book as a kind of posthumous testimony, a confession addressed to the Western world, to the English reader; a document delivered from beyond the grave - smuggled out of the Mausoleum. Probably it should be regarded as yet another opocryptal item of Leniniana, of an enigmatic Egyptian cult of Lenin's mummy. With all its grotesqueness this cult was necessary for the Soviet system. Paradoxically, it was a typically Leninist invention in its logic. A visible to ken of Lenin's continued presence and simultaneously of the mystery of what constituted the real Lenin, it is the perfect repository for ideological endorsement of whatever current Soviet policy happens to be. Former leaders are customarily accused of distorting Socialist ideals and the norms of Party democracy laid down by the great Lenin, which the current leader is trying to restore to their former glory by appealing to Lenin's mummy. A proper quotation from the mummified classic is usually "discovered" in the archival toms to support such an appeal. No wonder that towards the end of the book Alan Brien's version of Lenin explains to a Western readership his own understanding of the words "perestroika" and "glasnost", obviously for Gorbachev's sake. Will the day come when the Russian people and the rest of the world will not need to read Lenin's prophetic diaries?

Meeting and parting

Elaine Feinstein

CAROL RUMENS
Plato Park
212pp. Chatto and Windus. £10.95.
0 7011 3202 7
Selected Poems
160pp. Chatto and Windus. £5.95.
0 7011 3201 9

In "A New Song", written in quatrains whose rhythm makes every rhyme jar and resonate, Carol Rumens sets out perfectly clearly the sources of her allegiance to an Eastern European identity which, in her own life, can only be at one remove. And yet, reading her poems, it is impossible not to feel that she is in addition looking for a shape in the outside world that accounts for her own sense of displacement. ("Letter from South London", for example) embody something else, a narrative exploration of the local commonplaces of her own experience, and that it is in these, rather than in the poems with grander themes, that we find her own very talent at its sharpest. In earlier days, she wrote a memorable poem in which an old Byronic carpet sweeper amusingly articulates the sad sense of women who have not escaped from the diligent work imposed on them:

The light of all women
These days are shaped by rooms.
It was presumably her readiness to enter

other lives which attracted her to fiction. *Plato Park*, Rumens's first novel, is intriguing in its fluent understanding of the world of Borodin's witty, and informative novel, *Partings*: the Moscow world of media wheezing and dealing which bears such an uncomfortable similarity to its counterpart in the West. She takes characters from both sides of the curtain, who are passionately attracted to the world they don't know: Arkady, a poet who works on a literary journal, and makes sense of his life through sexual conquest; Elizabeth, the student daughter of an English academic on holiday with him in Moscow; and Ilya, once a gifted student at the Conservatoire, who lost his place through a mixture of sexual jealousy and anti-semitism. Arkady has a passionate admiration for everything English, Ilya a more realistic sense of the market value of Beatles records, which he tapes illicitly from the Voice of America. During their short holiday, Elizabeth becomes sexually involved with Arkady and falls in love with Ilya, and the novel traces what effect these encounters have on them all over a number of years, using letters (one from Arkady to Elizabeth, long and revealing but never sent, contains some affectingly credible poems) and journals to do so.

Most deeply disturbed is Arkady, for whom Elizabeth personifies everything he cannot find in his own life. He longs for her sexually, but in a sense she breathes England to him more than lust. In his imagination her hair smells like grass. In her presence the flax he borrowed for the attempted seduction looks

drab and rickety, and the oilcloth on the table, pocked with burnholes, makes him feel the aleaziness of his whole unromantic pursuit of her. He is quite mistaken about Elizabeth's innocence, however, and even more about her inaccessibility; but Elizabeth makes her own mistakes, since she altogether misreads his genuine emotion and finds him pushy. Her vision of Ilya ("All we ever talked about 'was music'") would also have been very surprising to Arkady, who has no sense of any lyricism in his friend, though he is sorry when he is gaoled for hoodlums after a demonstration demanding the right of Jews to emigrate.

A subplot concerns the diary of Boba, which Arkady is asked to take to England after it has been translated. Boba, who once ran a feminist journal railed by the KGB, was tortured by psychiatrists in a hospital where she dies fighting to resist the poisonous drugs. In some ways Boba's own diary is the most ambitious piece of writing Rumens attempts, since she is forced to take on threats which cannot be dealt with in urbane terms; perhaps for this reason, the syntax of Boba's own journal dissolves as she is driven out of her mind by drugs.

This is a departure for Rumens, since so much of the pathos and courage of her poetry comes from the way in which she confronts painful experience with balance and control. To read her *Selected Poems*, however, is to watch her abandoning safety, and finding an utterance which makes her one of the finest younger poets writing in England today.

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The anti-war war

Mark Childress

JOHN CALVIN BATCHELOR
American Falls
619pp. Grafton. Paperback, £5.95.
0586185688

While the United States today luxuriates in television reminiscences of Vietnam, many American novelists are reaching back to explore an even bloodier and more divisive conflict, which in the South is still referred to on occasion as "The War of Northern Aggression". Politically-minded fiction-writers, in particular - among them Gore Vidal, Tom Wicker and William Safire - have found along the twisting road from First Bull Run to Appomattox the signposts of our modern discontent. Now comes John Calvin Batchelor, author of *The Birth of the People's Republic of Antardica*, with a dense and ambitious novel of a Civil War we hadn't imagined before.

American Falls tells of a desperate clandestine war between the two fledgling Secret Services, Union and Confederate. The year is 1864. Driven by the South's declining fortunes on the battlefields, Jefferson Davis has sent saboteurs and agent provocateurs into Canada to promote Copperhead anti-war efforts in Northern cities and harass the war-weary Yankees across the border. Abraham Lincoln is in deep political trouble as the war drags on and the election approaches; he can't afford mass arrests of the traitors, even when they infiltrate the city of New York and plan an incendiary uprising for Election Day, but he can send his spies to keep an eye on things.

Though we are shown the great leaders in intriguing glimpses, Batchelor's concerns are with the agents themselves, in a time of confused loyalties and increasing bloodthirstiness on both sides. His staunch Union detective, Captain Amariah Butler, is a burly soldier from Maine, a veteran of the Virginia battlefields, obsessively dedicated to tracking his sly Rebel foe, one John Oliphant. Mysterious,

aloof and incredibly cool, Oliphant is the sort of spy who's never quite sure whether he's working for, or if he's working at all.

Butter trails Oliphant from the border at Niagara Falls in New York, and there follows a lively rendered tour of the old city as he meets his fellow conspirators (or does he?). This is the hypochondriac New York of Thurlow Weed and Hamant's Museum and the bright-light parade. Batchelor's sweeping brush is not its best on this broad, vivid canvas. The colours and textures are absolutely right; the era comes alive, and this speaks both for the author's prodigious research and his ability to throw history into relief with bold, emotionally charged characterizations.

All is not as Captain Butter presumes. His superior keep throwing him off Oliphant's trail, and his prey is himself unsure of his purpose. Conspiracies develop, unravel and develop again almost without Oliphant's knowledge. The story moves to Washington City, to Lincoln's very parlour. Increasingly, Butter and Oliphant find themselves devoted to the same end: stopping the war at any cost.

The author travels back in time to antebellum South Carolina to examine the sources of Oliphant's mystery, and his complex, vaguely incestuous love life. He gives us a fascinating parade of detectives, spies, turncoats, early radicals - the dark side of a darkening war. As in our own day, the most interesting moral issues are played out by the shadiest people. In his zeal to explore those issues in full, the author occasionally makes his characters say or do things that don't feel like independent decisions. Not these suspensions of belief are temporary, and he brings his story to a powerful, satisfying conclusion under the roar of the American Falls at Niagara.

This is a novel about all kinds of American falls - the fall of a nation from innocence, the fall of noble-minded men from grace and of scales from our eyes. John Calvin Batchelor is an immensely serious writer with an unexpected gift for comic moments. His book deserves congratulations and a second reading.

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The scapegoat's demise

Linda Taylor

GAIL GODWIN
A Southern Family
530pp. Heinemann. £11.95.
0434 297534

There's nothing like a death to crystallize family feeling. In the case of the Quicks (the American southern family in question), it is Lily and Ralph's twenty-eight-year-old son, Theo, who dies - he shoots himself, it appears, after shooting a woman who has refused to marry him. With this act, Theo concentrates attention on himself in death in a way he never managed in life: at best he'd been humorously cynical and disgusted; at worst, a failure. With the demise of the family scapegoat, Theo's relations are forced to look elsewhere for blame - particularly within themselves.

Having given herself an excuse for exploring hearts and consciences, Gail Godwin embarks with gusto on her tale of twentieth-century southern family life. Each member of the extended family (Lily, Ralph, Theo's brother Rafe, Theo's half sister Clare, Theo's ex-wife Snow, Theo's son Jason, Clare's friend Julia, Clare's cousin Felix, Julia's father and Felix's daughter) has a tale to tell, a history to be explored. Snow, the insolent (in the Quicks' eyes) mountain girl, with her trailer home and her vulgarity, gets to tell hers in the first person; which is one way of further separating her while endearing the reader's sympathy.

Apart from the rich-humour-tapestry angle, the point of the book is an explication of the American South. The story begins with the relationship between Claro, the daughter who escaped to New York City and became a writer, and Julia, the historian who has returned to keep an eye on her ailing, sceptically liberal father. Though Clare is away from it all, she is enmeshed in the mutual destructiveness of the Quicks - what Theo calls their polite aggression. As representatives of the South, the Quicks (despite their get-rich-quick building trade money) are sequestered, aloof, bigoted, snobbish and introverted - a set of qualities informed by their Catholicism. Clare, defending herself from them, wraps them up (Theo says) in books with happy endings.

The ending of *A Southern Family* is bland rather than happy, but the weakness of the novel lies in the sheer quantity of material used to say very little. Not one character in the book is developed in a way that counts in a novelistic sense: there are no brilliant caricatures, no sustained psychological depths. While telling everything there is to tell about everyone, it seems, Godwin's insights remain wholly unsurprising. The Quicks, billed by one another as idiosyncratic, intriguing, provoking, proud, bitter, magical, dangerous, anguished, entangled and all the rest of it, might just as well be living in Tooling for all the narrative excitement they generate.

Putting the house in order

John Peake

JOHN CROWLEY
A Egypt
390pp. Gollancz. £11.95.
0575041080

From *The Deep to Little, Big*, John Crowley's novels have grown steadily in size. But there has been no accompanying increase in flab. Rather, the greater the length, the greater the richness of the language, the depth of perception and the sense of solidity, reality and wonder. This new book continues that exponential growth. It is as sizeable as *Little, Big*, and the first volume in a projected sequence of four; and it makes even its predecessor seem shallow by comparison.

Crowley is an artificer: the structures he creates, the object of paper and ink he finally produces, are all as vital to *A Egypt* as the story he has to tell. He makes no secret of the fictionality of this work. It opens with an author's note, which is later reproduced by the main character as the author's note to his own book, and the breakdown of the distinction between the real and the fictional is part of what *A Egypt* is about. The best way of describing this multi-form novel might be to compare it to one of Crowley's most vivid creations. The house of Edgewood is a splendid architectural curiosity which presents a completely different façade whichever way you approach it. *A Egypt* is a literary Edgewood, full of different façades, all of which have the same heart.

History lecturer Pierce Muffett stops off in the Faraway Mountains on his way to an interview for a new job, and never completes the journey. What he finds in the town of Blackbury Jambes provides him with a retreat, and the inspiration for a new book. This book is about A Egypt, a country of the imagination which may be congruent with the real Egypt, and which has been, throughout history, a source of magic and inspiration. His book, which he is only starting work on by the end of this volume, is about creativity and the historical imagination, and it shares more than a few features with Crowley's *A Egypt*.

One of Muffett's inspirations for the book is the historical novelist Fellows Kraft, former resident of Blackbury Jambes, whose books themselves form a considerable part of the content of *A Egypt*. Thus we meet Gloriano Bruno, whose advanced ideas set him at odds with the sixteenth-century Vatican, and we see Doctor Dee and a young William Shakespeare discovering angels in a tarry glass.

All this could be rich enough for most

novels, but it barely gives a glimpse of what is to be found here. In Crowley's universe everything interacts with everything else. The families in Blackbury Jambes with whom Muffett comes into contact all have their parts to play; as do the child-minder whose meditations take him out into the depths of space; Rosie and her child, getting over a divorce, whose family possessions include the papers of Fellows Kraft; and above all the astrological system that seems, in some way, to subsume the rest.

I don't know whether this system is a recognized one or has simply been invented by Crowley; in the long run it doesn't really matter. The twelve houses each have their own attribute, and the main part of this novel is divided into three, each chapter bearing the name of one of these zodiacal houses. "Vita", life, "Lucrum", possessions, and "Frates", family and friends, are the first three signs of this zodiac; and it is possible to see that each chapter reflects, obliquely, the attribute of the house it is named for. It seems likely that the full significance of this, as of so much else in the book, will only come clear when the full zodiac of twelve houses and four novels is laid before us.

This may suggest that *A Egypt* is a dense, slow, difficult book, and in a sense it is. But its own vivid reality is an absorbing one, and it leaves the reader impatient for the second volume.

Crime file

WILLIAM BAYER
Pattern Crimes
296pp. Michael Joseph. £10.95.
07181 28885

When several identically mutilated corpses are discovered in and around Jerusalem, David Bar-Lev, head of the Jerusalem Police Pattern Crimes division, is given the task of investigating the murders. He soon discovers that they are not the random killings of a maniac; behind them lurks something even more sinister, and his search involves him with Israeli intelligence agencies, right-wing religious fanatics, a world-famous Russian émigré sculptor, and a young Russian concert cellist, also a defector, once the sculptor's mistress, who becomes Bar-Lev's. This is a well-written, intricately plotted book, which, for once, successfully weaves the detective's personal life into his investigation. There is a map of Jerusalem on the end-papers.

J. Binyon

A look at the worst

William Scammell

SEAN O'BRIEN
The Frighteners
64pp. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe.
Paperback, £4.50.
18524 013

Sean O'Brien first came to prominence in *A Rumoured City*, Douglas Dunn's anthology of Hull-based poets; *The Indoor Park* (1983) confirmed his promise, and the opening line seemed to acknowledge an inheritance from Philip Larkin: "It is so simple, being lonely". Now comes *The Frighteners*, a Somerset Maugham Award winner, which opens with a marvellous short poem, "In a Military Archive", so economical, so witty and sardonic and lyrical that it goes straight into the memory-bank. The dead listen to the clock, smoke, look at their hands, "mend the furniture and read".

The King's Own -shire Amperstands, Preserved as footnotes in the texts Of Hockley, Blunden, Hart et al., At once in the grave-geographies Of Arras, Albert and Thiépval. Now literature is sent, as once Were razor-blades and letters, That the dead may study suffering In the language of their betters.

That combines or crosses the unflinching gravitas of a Geoffrey Hill (line four above) with something of the panache of Auden's best light

verse.

Unfortunately the poems that follow don't maintain this exhilarating standard. "Now ask for a match. / Your face in my arse, says the serving-batch" of "The Turd Café"; this is just imitation of the later Larkin. Uncertainties of tone and direction are evident in nods to various other contemporaries such as Peter Reading ("You poets of the little songs / Devoted to the muse . . ."), Tony Harrison, and the Dunn of *Barbarians*, and in the glum "Ryan" poems of the book's middle section. "If you think he's insufferable you're probably right: but if you say so I'll send him round to your house", warns an arch introductory note. The idea is to infuse the banality of Ryan's life and times with a redeeming wit, exacting honesty from a full look at the worst; but too often he sounds merely know-all, a lefty mirror-image of pretty well everything he loathes.

Things look up again in the book's last section, with the engaging light verse of "Fiction and the Reading Public", which sarcastically comments on Norman Mailer's behaviour towards the victim-hero of *The Executioner's Song* in much the same way that James Fenton once attacked A. Alvarez's "extremist" theory of poetry, and in "Cousin Coat", a "malodorous companion" to and symbol of his social and political attitudes. "And what you are is what I tried to shed / In libraries with Donne and Henry James", the "clabmy itch" of his conscience:

Be with me when they cauterise the facts.
Be with me to the bottom of the page,

cended this, into a harder, more solid presentation of the outside world, particularly in two fine poems about manual work, "The Spot-Welder's Song" and "The Barrel-Dance" (the latter reprinted here).

The new book, *Tourists*, is a mukboon; that is, a book of short poems followed by a long poem bearing an uncertain relation to them - in this case the title-poem. The book has the virtue of the unprolific, which is that each poem is the only treatment of its subject and so stays distinct in the memory. Although Lindop's previous strengths - eloquence, wit and concreteness - are in evidence, as well as some occasional characteristic weaknesses (the wit trying too hard, as in "Monuments", or imagery pushed too far, or some recidivism into the present tense), it is an extremely impressive achievement, far surpassing its predecessors.

Some of the poems strike a new, sombre public note: "In Europe Everything Has Been Painted", for instance. And Lindop's already proven powers of description are extraordinary here (indeed his faults occur when they are in excess). This is the onset of "Migraine":

It begins with a cursor,

Things being various

Simon Rae

JAMES LASDUN
A Jump Start
46pp. Secker and Warburg. Paperback, £5.
0436 242435

James Lasdun's poetry is rich in visual imagery, delights in traditional forms, and takes as its subject-matter a background that can only be described as privileged. One can almost hear the proponents of a social conscience in poetry demanding of this entertaining and accomplished first volume: Is life no more than one long round of foreign holidays, sophisticated girlfriends and élitist culture? On the one occasion when politics does intrude in "Tea with a Politician", the poet admits to having been among the hostile mob pelting an entrenched bastion of the reactionary right - but still ends up having tea with him.

The glittering brilliance of Lasdun's poetry is influenced by the Parnassian, Leconte de Lisle, and variations of two of his poems, "Le Rêve du Jaguar" and "Les Éléphants", are included in this collection. Lasdun's visual facility was demonstrated in the short stories lo

The Silver Age (1985), which revealed in, or showed a fascination with, the fullness and variety of the world of things. In the poem "Buying a Dress", with a pleasing nod to John Donne, Lasdun parades his energetic apprehension of captivating detail:

I'm thinking of the day we bought a dress,
Trying on most of London's stock for size -
From Columbine to Pansy, polka dots,
Were washed in prism splashes, polka dots,
In patterned mascots of the male world - yachts,
Hot-air balloons, and motorbikes that traced
A knee-high Capricorn Equator waist;
My little Earth, each lowered stall a night
She'd break from, like a planet into light,
Massed colours, samite, lace, merino wool,
And where the stood, each mirror's pool seemed full
To bursting, like a swollen waterdrop's
Bulging convexity . . .

Lasdun's cornucopian vision is again apparent in "Portugal: The Fight". The subject of this poem, as of the majority in the book, is a relationship, and the fight of the title is a bullfight which affords the daunting image of a fight which affords the daunting image of a lover/Willing a silent telephone to ring / [who] Becomes: the unnamed treader we saw / Taunting a stubborn bull the goads had left / Unweakened, till suddenly it charged / And rammed him straight against the pen / Six feet

insisting on what history exacts.
Be memory, be conscience, wild and rage,
And keep me cold and honest, cousin coat,
So if I lie, I'll know you're at my throat.

"After this Poem" achieves a believable tenderness, which is a relief after all the tough talk that surrounds it, and "Tonight" even attempts straight lyric, though the muscled needed for that exercise are not very well developed.

In general one has an impression of O'Brien oiling the machinery, polishing up impressive skills, digesting all his contemporaries, on the lookout for worthwhile subject-matter. The prevailing tone is dour, sceptical, hard-edged, and complacent. "How quickly childhood makes itself / The subject of all pain. At least / Unhappiness was made to match." This takes us back to Larkin, and so do the cadences of this same poem, "The Realists", which circles round impoverishment and half-truths and polite English fictions. Soon "words will be all we can make. / So that meaning deserts them, then self, / Until only the voices are left / For the listeners awake on the stairs, / Who have learned to believe this is how / These affairs are conducted, and think / Of a day they will speak for themselves." On the book's cover Peter Porter speaks of "fiction-making monsters" and "extravagances" pouring out of these poems, but that perhaps takes the will for the deed. "Six cranes where the bullet is off / And no-one jumps ship", says "Unregistered", and that's all too typical. The ballet is always off, the crew immured in self-protective irony.

winking flaw in the magic glass of vision, a ghost-note twirling just off-limits: where you look it still isn't, but now there's a tease, that hunts the confident panning of your gaze, a dropped stitch threatening the whole.

This descriptive power is brought into play on unlikely subjects, and transfigures them; "Summer Pudding" is a recipe, but one of great compulsion. The descriptive skills are joined by a wit which is both lexical ("pursy", "scumbled") and syntactic ("Little-finger-sized"). There is an ambitious sequence of twenty-one short poems to illustrate wood engravings by Bewick, an enterprise evocative of Richard Murphy's *The Price of Stone*. With these, despite the characteristic precision, a lack of something along the lines of the "applications" that Bewick himself provided for his Aesop is felt, I think (some are disconcertingly evocative of Punch caption competitions).

It is, however, neither by this sequence nor by the long closing poem that the volume stands, but by twenty-odd unforgettable new short poems which show a perceptive intelligence and rare linguistic skill in fruitful collaboration.

below us in the furrowed sand, / His toppled body crushed, and bright with gore, / The bull led out alive to fight again.

The women in Lasdun's poetry tend to be formidable - the one in the title-poem is setting out to be interviewed for an "M.Phil / In Women's Studies" when the car fails to start, initiating the race against time with the neighbour's jump-leads - while the men, for the most part, find the struggle on uphill one. Thus the closing lines of "Bridal":

look how the father
Looms up from a dazzling winter sun -
Grin of a spec's welcoming its own:
One hand on your shoulder, in the other
A champagne bottle smoking like a gun.

In *The Poetry of R. S. Thomas* (151pp. Bridgand, Mid Glamorgan: Poetry Wales Press, £9.95, 0 907476 51 1) J. P. Ward writes that Thomas's poetry "indicates a strong character covering a deep hurt, a piercing visual perception, the sharpest intelligence, and a profound longing for a gap to be filled", but intentionally he introduces biographical details "only in so far as the appraisal of the poetry seemed to require it."

Old muddle

Anne Haverty

JOHN WAIN
Open Country
80pp. Hutchinson. Paperback, £5.95.
0 09 168261 4

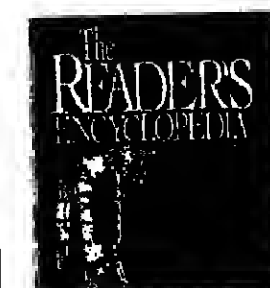
John Wain was one of the angry young men of the 1950s, the reasons for whose rage have always seemed obscure. He is still quite querulous in a mellow kind of way, though what side he is on is now more apparent. He is a fogey, inclining towards the old muddle rather than the new. In his new collection of poems, *Open Country*, he wears the colours of the radical conservative. He is for the England of his youth and before that, for sailing-ships, nature and the industries that bred belching chimney-stacks, gave a mood and colour to things.

Wain is against the new technology and for the old. For Stoke-on-Trent - "Here, coal and clay come together to breed oxy / where life is strong and resilient though never pretty". He has a romantic view of Oxford as an arcadian grove of academe, regretting, in a tribute to Bejeman, that the other William Morris committed "moral and aesthetic sedition" with his motor-wrorks at Cowley "however unconsciously by letting his monster loose / to wring the neck of Oxford like a Christmas goose".

The poems here are sometimes tendentious, eccentric, and Wain has a tendency to tug at an innuendo to the point of exhausting it. But there are several rugged and vigorous pieces written with a faultless ear and a felicity that counteracts their prosiness; enough certainly to make this collection highly readable.

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Ezra's appropriations

K. K. Ruthven

As everybody knows, the emergence of so-called little magazines coincides with that of Anglo-American modernism. Ezra Pound's involvement in one such magazine, which was called at first *The New Freewoman* and later *The Egoist*, highlights not only the prime importance of criticism in the identification and circulation of new writing, but also the manipulative processes by which some texts are discredited and ignored, and others privileged. "Every author", Coleridge told Wordsworth, "as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been, so will it continue to be." The message for moderns is clear. If you want to revolutionize contemporary poetry, it is not enough to write revolutionary poems: you need to explain to your readers exactly what is revolutionary about them, and to do so in terms which they will find usable. To represent poetry as technical experimentation, and to get away with it, indicates not only the prestige of scientific method in the nineteenth-century discourses of the arts, but also its status as a ground on which discussion can take place. For to claim that your poems are interesting principally because they are experimental is to put in the foreground writing as technique, and to transform poetry from being the expression and encounter of sensibilities into a technology of communication.

New writing is unlikely to be perceived as such unless accompanied either directly or indirectly by discursive accounts of its novel features. Before the advent of specifically literary reviews, a major problem for writers was where to plant information which would educate a potential readership to appreciate a new kind of writing. Writers who dominated the little magazines in the second and third decades of this century controlled the discussion of literature and of poetry in particular, and it

was their version of modernism which was taken over by the academics as the study of modern literature came to be institutionalized. The front man in that operation was T. S. Eliot, that "invisible" writer (as Hugh Kenner calls him) who could do the critics in different voices, and who worked as it were behind enemy lines in "respectable" journals to undermine those cultural prejudices which militated against acceptance of the new. But the person who did most to create a forum for cultural dissent was Ezra Pound, and the medium he chose was the little magazine. Their purpose, he noted in 1935, was to "break a monopoly" by conservative editors and publishers of the modes of literary production; and it is this benign (indeed heroic) interpretation of events which has tended to be replicated in Pound-influenced accounts of literary history. A re-examination of what actually went on, however, reveals that Pound went in for monopoly-breaking in order to set in place a monopoly of his own. He was willing to write for anybody on practically anything, ostensibly to earn a living. This is another benign and Pound-promoted version of what he was actually up to, which was to colonize the maximum amount of newly available space in the little magazines, both in *propria persona* and under a variety of pseudonyms. He tried - sometimes successfully - to take over journals he wrote for, and persuaded impressionable friends to edit them and patrons to fund them. He even became an editor himself, professing in order to get important writing into print, but in fact to strengthen his control over the production and circulation of literary and critical texts.

For insights into this process *The Egoist* presents an especially interesting case, since before Pound appropriated it for the modernist movement it had been a feminist journal called *The New Freewoman*, edited by Dora Marsden. Marsden came out of the Women's Social and Political Union founded by the Pankhursts, and had had first-hand experience of the breaking of suffragette hunger-strikers by

force-feeding. But in the belief that there was more to feminism than the issue of votes for women, in November 1911 she launched a weekly paper of her own called *The Freewoman*, subtitled at first "A Weekly Feminist Review", but by May 1912 "A Weekly Humanist Review", the change signalling Marsden's break with separatist feminism in order to demonstrate (in her own words) "that the two causes, man's and woman's, are one". *The Freewoman* ceased publication in October 1912, which was (coincidentally) the date of the first issue of what was to become the most famous and durable of twentieth-century little magazines, *Poetry* (Chicago). *Poetry* was edited by Harriet Monroe, who employed Ezra Pound as her foreign editor during the years of Imagism's greatest proliferation. Although *The Freewoman* went out of existence, however, the Freewoman Discussion Circle continued to be active - so much so, indeed, as to revive the journal on June 15, 1913 - as *The New Freewoman*. It was financed largely by Harriet Shaw Weaver, the daughter of a well-off Cheshire family, who was a social worker in London's East End before becoming caught up in the establishment of the South London Hospital for Women. Weaver's money made possible the setting-up of a small publishing company in Bloomsbury Street called The New Freewoman Ltd. Marsden stayed on as editor, with Rebecca West as co-editor, and for a time it looked like business as usual, with articles on such matters as labour problems, free love, and the supersession of matriarchy by patriarchy. But two things served to upset the old equilibrium: one was Rebecca West's desire to increase the literary content of *The New Freewoman*, and the other was Dora Marsden's open-door policy for the journal. Rebecca West reviewed in *The Freewoman* Ezra Pound's *Sonnets and Ballads of Guido Cavalcanti*; she met Pound in 1913, and was aware of his activities as literary talent scout for *Poetry*

continued on page 1300

In brief

The overall winner of this year's British Airways Commonwealth Poetry Prize, appropriately enough, was *Sky Poems* by Philip Salom, the Australasian nominee, who also won the Prize in 1981. (Other regional winners were Tanure Ogaide - Africa; Keki Darwalla - Asia; Edward Kamau Brathwaite - Caribbean and Canadian; and George Barker - UK; winner of the award for a first publication was Dinah Hawken, from New Zealand.) The congratulatory speeches and readings, though, followed the revelation that this, the third year of British Airways' sponsorship of the awards (prize-money totals £11,000), was to be their last. There was some irony, too, then, in the title of an anthology of Commonwealth Poetry Prize-winning poems, published simultaneously with the awards, and edited by Alastair Niven (the new Literature Director of the Arts Council): *Under Another Sky* (103pp. Carcanet. £6.95. 0 85635 729 4).

All this, coupled with talk of a common language crossing cultural and ethnic divides, was plainly too much for George Barker, who confined his offering on prize-giving night to a single couplet: "You ask me where I'm going, Well, I'm passing through England on my way to hell." The Institute will seek new sponsorship for this prestigious and notably high-spirited award.

What does a diplomatic wife think about? Certainly not just entertaining foreign dignitaries. Postings in exotic places have inspired a fury of fiction writing, and last week the Diplomatic Service Wives Association announced the winners of its first-ever short story competition. The Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, PEN editor Peter Day, the *Spectator's* Charles Moore, Timothy Gee - ex-head of the Cultural Relations Department, and Katharine Whitcomb of the *Observer*, selected three winners out of 152 entries from all over the world ("with multiple submissions from Havana"). None of the three were, in the end, wives, or even women, although among the eleven short-listed there were a few, "including the Ambassador's wife in Prague", the press release proclaimed. Winning themes ranged from lesbian relations between a tutor and her charge, a diplomatic daughter, to abuses of official privilege and dreams of revenge. "Cold Feet", the second place winner by John Hedley, from the South American desk, is the story of an officer who chops up his wife, puts her pieces into Tupperware boxes, and sends them out in diplomatic bags. The wife of Prague tells a tale of take-over in the foreign office: a mutiny of wives. The winners will be awarded computers and antique decanters while the runners up will receive £100 credit accounts at Hatchesards, and some of the stories will be published ("Cold Feet" will appear in *The Literary Review*).

For devotees of the spoken word, Douglas Cleverdon will be remembered as the producer (and preserver) of *Under Milk Wood*, and as the person who could coax not one piece, but even a series, out of a man as shy as Henry Reed, a genius given rein by the possibilities of the Third Programme. By the time he joined the BBC, shortly before the war, he had proved himself a talented bookseller, friend and publisher of the graphic work of David Jones and Eric Gill, to both of whose memories he was devoted. He missed the publication of one of his last enterprises (not quite the final one) by less than three weeks. Gill's *A Book of Alphabets* (Wellingtonborough, Christopher Skelton. £42. 0 948906 00 6) dates from Cleverdon's early years in Bristol as a bookseller, when he required a pattern for his shop notices to fit Gill's own faecal sans-serif capitals. To oblige, Gill drew the complete alphabet, but accompanied it with a certified upper and lower case, and by way of index introduced yet another design. The album of drawings has long been celebrated, though seldom seen in full, and since 1957 has been at Austin, Texas. Its publication is now Cleverdon's own memorial to one part of his many careers - less brightly, and only a silent reminder of conversation that always had an edge of surprise; but surely no less elegant than one would wish.

There is no obvious best buy for readers setting themselves up with a more or less complete Dickens. The Oxford Illustrated is nearer completeness than any other, and is well produced if textually imperfect, but the introductions to its volumes are - with a few distinguished exceptions - singularly empty and inept. The Everyman reprints, also textually corrupt, are typographically inferior. All but one of them still carry the introductions written by G. K. Chesterton - brilliant, stimulating, posturing, time-wasting, inaccurate and reflecting the taste and state of knowledge of the early 1910s. In paperback, the Everymans are decidedly cheap.

The Penguin reprints always leave me grieving about the missing half-porth of tar. Several non-fictional and short-story volumes are omitted; only some of the original illustrations are included; and editors, evidently given fairly free rein textually and in other matters, sometimes perform excellently and sometimes much less well. At least, however, the Penguin volumes do make some sort of statement about their textual basis (most reprints don't - the new Oxford Illustrated does carry this information, but only on its jacket), even if their editors sometimes get it wrong. And there are some explanatory notes; Oxford Illustrated and Everyman have none. The World's Classics new Dickens series contains, as yet, few titles, but they are commendable as being textually superior to any other cheap reprint, and having thoroughly competent introductions and useful, if slight, annotations. The Clarendon series (seven volumes so far) caters for the specialist reader and is very expensive. The Norton Critical Editions have every virtue - good text, annotation, critical and scholarly material - and are very reasonably priced, but two volumes do not at all *convince*. So at present the Penguin series remains collectively the best buy.

vision by the author. The textual history of *Pickwick Papers*, as of almost all the novels that were to follow, is one of steady deterioration during Dickens' lifetime. Dickens, it transpires, though in other respects the great professional, was a poor proof-reader and usually a very sporadic and undiligent reviser. He could even ignore his own published Errata slips. Every fresh reprint inevitably introduced its crop of new errors, most of them henceforth carried forward, and sometimes printers took it upon themselves to regularize and amend his text, and he either didn't notice or didn't mind. Thus, as Sylvère Monod and George Ford demonstrate in detail - their Norton Critical Editions of *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* are Clarendon's only peers in textual authority - the Charles Dickens Edition of *Bleak House* is the worst, not the best, published during Dickens' lifetime. What they say of that novel applies generally: "the unsuitability of the Cheap Library and Charles Dickens Editions for the purposes of copy-text still needs to be vigorously - and, we hope, finally - exposed".

It took over a century before any edition corrected the misprints in the two opening sentences of *Edwin Drood*, which make nonsense of the third sentence. So, it might be argued, in works with as many words in them as Victorian novels, a modicum of misprinted words can be - manifestly have been - tolerated. Still, there is no merit in continuing to print "Tower" instead of "Towm" in those *Drood* opening sentences, or in having Dr Blimber write "unpleasantly" instead of "suppliciously" as the authors whose works he is consulting. And yet these and thousands of other such errors and inferior readings will reappear in the Oxford Illustrated reprint. The Delegates of the OUP must have had an intellectually complex debate about the ethics of re-issuing a series which, though popular, attractive and cheap, and presumably a venture that might subsidize other, more scholarly publica-

Dickensian errata

Philip Collins

429,750 lbs of paper, Oxford University Press announces, are being devoted to producing roughly 200,000,000 pages for 315,000 volumes of the Oxford Illustrated Dickens, a popular reprint launched between 1947 and 1958 but lately out of print. At £4.95 a volume (hardback) or £29.50 for the boxed twenty-one volume set, this is described as "A Christmas bargain even Scrooge couldn't resist". Typographically attractive and containing all the original illustrations well reproduced from remade plates, this is indeed a comely series. How much does it matter that the text reprinted is corrupt? (And OUP is well aware of the errors, for in its World's Classics series it has recently published several Dickens novels - and others have been commissioned - based on a markedly different recension of the text, derived from its post-prime Clarendon Dickens, the current on-going scholarly edition.)

Like most Dickens reprints, including Everyman and nearly half of Penguin, the Oxford Illustrated is textually based on the Charles Dickens Edition (1867-8, though quaintly dated 1860 in another recent OUP publicity document). This seemed the obvious choice of copy-text, being the last to appear during Dickens' lifetime; and its Prospective had made claims about the author's "present watchfulness" over it, as similar announcements for the earlier Cheap and Library editions had asserted that they too had been "carefully revised" by the author. Unfortunately recent research has shown that, in almost all cases, these claims were moonshine.

None of these editions, James Kinsley remarks in his introduction to the most recent Clarendon text - and he writes with additional authority as Joint General Editor of the series - shows evidence of sustained or consistent re-

vision by the author. The textual history of *Pickwick Papers*, as of almost all the novels that were to follow, is one of steady deterioration during Dickens' lifetime. Dickens, it transpires, though in other respects the great professional, was a poor proof-reader and usually a very sporadic and undiligent reviser. He could even ignore his own published Errata slips. Every fresh reprint inevitably introduced its crop of new errors, most of them henceforth carried forward, and sometimes printers took it upon themselves to regularize and amend his text, and he either didn't notice or didn't mind. Thus, as Sylvère Monod and George Ford demonstrate in detail - their Norton Critical Editions of *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* are Clarendon's only peers in textual authority - the Charles Dickens Edition of *Bleak House* is the worst, not the best, published during Dickens' lifetime. What they say of that novel applies generally: "the unsuitability of the Cheap Library and Charles Dickens Editions for the purposes of copy-text still needs to be vigorously - and, we hope, finally - exposed".

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Letters

'Life: A User's Manual'

Sir, - I do not wish to reply to most of what Gabriel Josipovici has found to say (Letters, November 13-19) in defence of his own assessment of my translation of Georges Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi* (October 30-November 5), as I would prefer you readers to draw their own conclusions from his examples of my supposedly "awkward renderings". Few readers, however, will be able to grasp the full extent of your reviewer's predicament without knowing the following facts, which, though they relate only to one point in Josipovici's 31-column-inch letter, constitute the loose end of a thread which may perhaps unravel what must now look like a very tangled skein of argument.

In 1985, Josipovici published an article in *Yearbook of English Studies*, XV, 179-200, entitled "Georges Perec's Homage to Joyce (and Tradition)". The factual content of the article is taken from Perec's own "Quatre Figures pour *La Vie mode d'emploi*" published in *L'Arc* 76 (1979) and acknowledged once by Josipovici in footnote 4. However, as Josipovici wrote to me on a postcard dated September 23 last, "it was Claude [R]awson who insisted I bring in [sic] some Eng Lit into my article, as it was going into an issue on 'Anglo-French Lit Relations'". So I added title and last paras.

The last sentence of Perec's piece in *L'Arc* reads: "La maison dont rêve Léopold Bloom à la fin d'*Ulysse* est devenue la maison de poupée de la page 135" (op cit, p 52). On the last page of his article, Josipovici quotes the whole paragraph from page 135 of Perec's novel, and comments on it thus: "This doll's house is no more 'original' to Perec than any of the other elements which make up this book. It is taken from the end of the penultimate chapter of *Ulysses*, where it forms part of Bloom's fantasy of his 'ultimate ambition'" (*Yearbook of English Studies*, XV, 200). Josipovici does not acknowledge the source of this discovery, which he uses to introduce his final paragraph, devoted to the claim that *La Vie mode d'emploi* is "in particular a homage to Joyce . . . and to those *petits-bourgeois* values . . . which must form an indispensable ingredient in the life and character of every ambitious artist".

It is amusing to see Galen Strawson (in the *Observer*, October 18) quoting this same passage, from page 99 of the English edition of Perec, which is page 634 of the current Penguin edition of *Ulysses*, as an example of Perec's style. It is quite hilarious to find Josipovici now quoting, in his letter, in his desperate attempt to find fault with my translation, as an instance of "nonsense in English" (see top of column 2, p 1251, TLS).

James Joyce's French translators, whose task was perhaps even harder than mine, omitted a direct equivalent for "transverse" in the phrase "transverse obsolete medieval and oriental weapons" in the penultimate chapter of *Ulysses*. Perec used the French translation. I have restored the English original, as I have done for all borrowings from English-language authors in *Life: A User's Manual*. The decision to proceed in this way was taken after some correspondence with Harry Mathews and long discussion with Perec's German translator, Eugen Helmle, for whom Perec had prepared a list of all the passages from Mann and Kafka buried in the novel. Perec's and Helmle's aim was to give German readers as well as French ones the disturbing pleasure of reading sentences you think you remember having read somewhere else. My translation implements this aim for English readers.

Of course it doesn't matter at all if any given reader doesn't notice the borrowed paragraphs, or notices only a few, or can't quite grasp what it is that is familiar about this story or that picture in *Life: A User's Manual*. The novel is not written for learned readers alone. Of course it doesn't matter much if my reconstruction of Perec's puzzle trips up a Professor of Literature and traps him into declaring that a well-formed phrase from page 634 of *Ulysses* is "oddsome in English". But it should matter to anyone concerned with the ethics of literary reviewing that the originator of the first great red herring in British Perec studies - the notion that *Life: A User's Manual* is a "homage to Joyce" and to "the *petits-bourgeois* values . . . of every ambitious artist"

- pretends to forget the quotation he claimed to have found in order to malign a translation which - though obviously not faultless - is a great deal more careful and professional than Josipovici can begin to realize.

In all the wordage your reviewer has devoted to faulting the translation, he has mentioned three of the book's many mistakes, which are being put right in the current reprinting, and two passages of James Joyce. It's a bit late to apologize to the irascible Irishman; but an apology to me, to my publishers in the United Kingdom and the United States, and above all to my outstandingly erudite copy-editor - who is, ironically for your reviewer, Harry Mathews's copy-editor as well - is now due.

DAVID BELLOS,
Department of French Studies, The University,
Manchester.

The British Council

Sir, - I am saddened, especially as the author of the only comprehensive book on international cultural relations, that we make so little progress in our understanding of this important aspect of Britain's interaction with other countries. The report on Cultural Diplomacy by the Foreign Affairs Committee seemed to present an opportunity for the formulation, long overdue, of a clear external cultural policy. Simon Jenkins's article on the British Council (November 6-12) develops an interesting (though impracticable) privatization thesis, but this is institutional rather than fundamental. The distinction between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations is real. Both are important in different ways; the confusion between them is partly linguistic and does not bedevil other languages. Diplomacy, whether cultural or whatever, is conditioned by the changing dictates of politics, and not only external but also internal politics; it is by its nature short-term. Cultural relations are about bilateral and multilateral exchanges between national cultures; their essence is long-term, because they build lasting mutual relationships.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office did not grasp this in its evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Nor does it in its Observations on that committee's report. In these it says that the objective of all aspects of diplomacy is "the vigorous promotion of British interests". Well, yes - but who assesses those interests? If it is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on behalf of politicians, then there will not be much support from those who create and mediate in culture. Writers, academics and other specialists whom the British Council sends round the world, like those who receive officially sponsored visitors to our institutions, give their time and experience free. They do this out of professionalism, but also because they are willing to promote British interests as they see them. Surely no one believes that politicians or their representatives have any prerogative in the interpretation of national interest outside politics. We are a pluralist society.

Indeed, how do you convert Britain's cultural goods into a set of packages suitable for export? The British Council does this on the advice of high-powered specialist committees. But the question mark remains if we look at the problem in the widest context. And the international currency of our language - which we fail to exploit as we might - enlarges the problem.

It would be opportune to arrange a high-level conference with a view to producing some guidance towards an authoritative external cultural policy. Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, writers, academics, educationalists, arts administrators and artists could come together with officials of the FCO, Central Office of Information, British Council and BBC External Services, under ministerial chairmanship, to get some of the fundamental issues understood. Of course, in a way it is all about national interest, but this has to be seen in terms that correspond to the national will, or at least the will of elites. In an age when multifarious contact works in both directions across frontiers. Once we have a policy we can see how much money to put into it.

JOHN M. MITCHELL,
The Cottage, Pains Hill Corner, Limsfield, Surrey.

British Philosophy

Sir, - David Papineau's picture of the working life of a provincial professor (October 23-29) is as ill informed as the common provincial theory that Oxford dons do nothing but eat large dinners and sleep through tutorials. So large from giving few lectures and no tutorials in one week recently I gave six lectures (one in Cambridge), eight tutorials and two supervisions. I also ran a department, which does not consist of ageing no-hopers. Of the six currently in post, two are under thirty-five, and have links with other departments and faculties. Our collective publication record is well above par. Philosophy is alive and well in the provinces, despite the problems familiar to us all.

Dr Papineau's substantive and carefully considered remarks about the weakness of British philosophy (as being insufficiently "scientific" and technical) are not wholly erroneous. My own long-standing complaint against British philosophers concerns their ignorance of the history of their own subject (which was also alive and well in the two millennia between Aristotle and Descartes). Which perhaps suggests that David Papineau and I are both suffering from the irritation natural to a specialist that others do not share our enthusiasms.

S. R. L. CLARK,
Department of Philosophy, University of Liverpool,
PO Box 147, Liverpool.

Little Sparta

Sir, - Your columnist's note on Ian Hamilton Finlay (in brief, October 2-8) is ill informed. Whether Mr Finlay "staged a (losing) battle" against the Strathclyde Regional Council is a matter of judgment rather than fact: many people would credit him with a resounding moral victory. But it is inaccurate to state: "The original garden has been dismantled. Its treasures remain in the custody of the Strathclyde Sheriff Officer." The Sheriff Officer confined his attentions to work on display in the Garden Temple. The garden at Little Sparta has continued to flourish, and is the subject of a recent documentation by the French photographer Daniel Boudinet, which forms part of the current exhibition at the Fondation Cartier mentioned by your columnist.

STEPHEN BANN,
2 New Street, St Dunstan's, Canterbury, Kent.

A Powell Album

Sir, - In getting someone to write about Lady Violet Powell's guide to *A Dance to the Music of Time* (October 23-29) you ought surely to commission a reviewer who has read the original more attentively than Andrew Motion.

It is not Pamela who is a voyeur. Her trouble, if trouble it be, is more the Empress Messalina's - an obsession with being the participant rather than the spectator. Motion must have confused her with her husband, Kenneth Widmerpool, who, we are told in *Temporary Kings*, derives enjoyment from watching his wife and the French writer Ferrand-Sénéchal grapple with each other in a hotel bedroom, with such enthusiasm on the latter's part that he dies half way through.

CHARLES MOSLEY,
15 Onslow Avenue Mansions, Onslow Avenue,
Richmond, Surrey.

Ellen Terry

Sir, - If Brigid Brophy (November 6-12), next time she knows she's going to be in the vicinity of the Malvern Hills, would care to drop in with her one-sided copy of HMV 2-3535, she may be assured that, via my Columbia Viva-tonal Gramofona (with Slow-to-Fast Selector), the authentic tones of Ellen Terry will once more be heard. Ms Brophy need have no worries about needles. I can offer a choice of Songster Soft Tone, Zenophonon Loud, HMV Extra Loud, and even HMV Fibre.

For one of those responsible for enabling me to cop a P.L.R. cheque every year, this is the very least I can do.

JACK ADRIAN,
Clematis Cottage, Bury End Street, Cradley, nr
Malvern, Hereford and Worcester.

In their own words

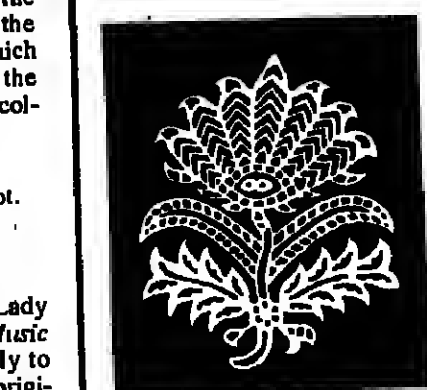
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COMMENTARY

Forms of tyranny

Keith Brown

SHAKESPEARE
Measure for Measure
Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Measure for Measure is a play of many virtues; but is also a difficult, clearly somewhat damaged Shakespearean text, speckled with what on the page appear to be moments of alarmingly soggy prose. The crisply clear delivery of this new RSC production sweeps us unawares past the latter problem, however, and other difficulties tend to be resolved or at least delimited with equally little fuss. The treatment of the ending of the play is one shining example of this. Traditional disputes, as to whether Isabella should shrink from the Duke's proposal of in neurotic chastity, or silently acquiesce, seem foolish when this Isabella (Jusette Simon) merely stares at the man in what appears to be incredulous distaste at the sheer crassness of his timing: he has, after all, only just ceased torturing her with false news of her brother's death. Approving murmurs from the audience attested the rightness of Miss Simon's response, and earlier remarks of the Duke have already prepared the way for it. It also has the advantage of still leaving open a possibility for the subsequent union of this couple, which the folklore traditions behind the comedy demand.

A similarly economical intelligence seems to guide the presentation of that potentially difficult figure, the Duke himself. In I.i, we are given the impression of a man fleeing his office out of a panicky feeling that he'll be having a nervous breakdown if he goes on much longer: an image which then dovetails neatly with the later depiction of the Duke in the disguise scenes as a slightly lightweight, easily flustered man. Lightly accentuated, this characterization in turn serves to increase the number of laughs extracted from the second half of the play – and if this is only achieved at the cost of a loss of plausibility in many incidents (how could anyone not suspect this false Friar?) and an increase in our distaste for some of the Duke's quasi-ecclesiastical pronouncements, we at least feel that in this production that price has been knowingly paid. The director, Nicholas Hytner, similarly allows us to enjoy our impression that Lucio has recognized the Duke in the disguise scenes and does not fuss too much about the eventual demonstration, at the play's end, that in fact he has not done so.

In short, an always enjoyable, much more than merely competent dramatization of a sometimes awkward text, though perhaps not a production that is really trying for the heights: in this it makes a good vehicle for Joanne Simon's Isabella. Miss Simon is a graceful actress, capable of being truly moving in small scenes (as at the end, or when breaking bad news to her brother), and communicates well the sense of a girl whose intense chastity is, as it were, genuinely integral to her bodily nature, rather than a mere exercise of will, theology and pride. But her rather light, even voice

does not have the range to exploit the full possibilities of the verse: which is perhaps why she seems slightly to lack the voltage for a great Isabella. This may be why one feels too – yet feels guilty about feeling – that Sean Baker's craftmanly portrayal of Angelo as a dry Scots precisian is also sometimes emotionally a little thin. But craftsmanship is very much the order of the day; from the nice balance held by Clodion Case (Barnardine) between the menace of his mighty muscles and the unfurled gentility of his manner, to Alex Jennings's wicked visual reminiscences of Edward VIII as Prince of Wales in his beautifully paced Lucio.

The performance so far described, however, is not quite that actually experienced in the theatre; for further depth and resonance are given to the evening by Mark Thompson's extraordinary set-design and the various related styles of the actors' costumes.

Most of the action of the play takes place on the relatively shallow forestage. Blocking most of the main stage are two gigantic columnar constructions, similar in type though not in detail. They suggest an ignorant archaeologist's blundering attempt to reconstruct a vanished London, in some future century, by combining cyclopean chunks of the base of Nelson's Column with enormous fragments of the new Lloyd's Building, rough-shod concrete, external tubing and all. At first glance, this seems the worst sort of arrogantly abusive Designer's Theatre, yet even so the ruthless energy of the concept somehow feeds helpfully into the play. But the classic "Nelsonian" elements of the design then prove to have been keyed to the respectable characters, by dressing them in dark, tightly tailored quasi-Victorian clothes; while the energy and ugliness of the gigantic tube-wreathed modern concrete inserts become a silent correlative of the vital yet disruptive world of the gaudily dressed low characters, apawning disorder. The vaguely Jacobean garb of Pompey and his friends, presumably picked up in some street-market and clashing both with the style of their betters and with that of the buildings around them, only increases the general aura of anarchy.

As characters both high and low scuffle obsessively about their business beneath these vast constructions (which can also rotate, to create an Alcatraz-style jail, or a city street) the resultant sense of oppression made visible and emblematic becomes doubly a part of the play. Both the low-life characters' sense of being loaded down by the weight of a (to them) irrelevant and outdated authority, and the oppression of the defenders of order by the sheer vitality of the proliferating modern urban jungle, become silently eloquent. No real further effort to point up the topicality of the play is needed, yet it has all been done without the least wrenching of the text. If this is the tyranny of the Designer, let us have more of it.

Running out of steam

David Nokes

The London Embassy
Thames Television

If Paul Theroux is to be believed, the only thing that American diplomats take seriously is jogging. Whether puffing along in grubby track-suits, or striding out in tall boots, the characters in the television version of *The London Embassy* do most of their work on the hoof through the parks of London, stopping off at occasional benches to meet a defecting Russian or a beguiling English aristocrat. The ambassador, played by Manning Redwood, likes to be known as "couch", and carries out briefings from the back of a limo, cranking alongside his peeling assistants. "Keep running. Make it look natural", he tells them in a conspicuously conspiratorial manner.

These running jokes are the nearest thing to wit in a television adaptation which is otherwise limp and laze. Theroux's original stories are elegant sprints, brisk and deft, full of wry humour. Spencer Savage as narrator has a sharp eye for eccentricity and an acute ear for

Ambivalent about the East

John Deathridge

W. A. MOZART
Die Entführung aus dem Serail
Royal Opera House

Die Entführung aus dem Serail has probably attracted more dotty productions than any other Mozart opera. For its first Covent Garden performance in 1827, at the height of the War of Greek Independence, its action was transferred to "a Greek Island in the Archipelago". Conveniently forgetting the fate of the Elgin marbles two decades earlier, the English adapter William Dimond allowed Osman, the dastardly Turk, to order a gang of labourers to dismantle Greek treasures ("trumpery") and to use them to fill up a ditch behind the stables of the Pasha. Underscoring British support in the demise of the Ottoman Empire, Dimond also let Blonde, who is English, start a rebellion in the Pasha's harem after she has fallen in love with an Irish doctor called O'Callaghan. Extra music was provided by Christian Kramer, Master and Conductor of His Majesty's Band.

The days of such "arrangements" are mercifully over. Yet producers are still tempted to tinker with *Die Entführung*. For Scottish Opera in 1978, David Pountney turned parts of it into a feminist outcry. In August Everding's Munich production during the American hostage crisis in Iran in 1980, Pasha Selim was transformed, just before Constanze's bravura aria "Märtern aller Arten" ("tortures of all kinds"), into the Aytollah Khomeini. Most radically of all, Rüdiger Berghaus rejected the oriental atmosphere of the opera altogether in Frankfurt in 1981, and replaced it with a decidedly Western array of traumatized, alienated individuals lost in a maze of spurious bourgeois morality.

Covent Garden's last performance of *Die Entführung* in 1938 under Beecham took some musical liberties, notably the removal of "Märtern aller Arten" from the second to the third act, after the abduction scene, where it makes no sense whatever. Their new production, after almost forty years, at least leaves everything in place. It is also the first I have seen where the producer tries to interpret the opera's ambiguities without some kind of ideological cant that makes the work too big for its boots. As Thomas Bauman shows in a forthcoming book on *Die Entführung*, the seemingly innocent images of cruelty and sexual licence in the opera are common in a century that had deeply ambivalent feelings about Islam and the East. Mozart makes the stereotypes work several ways at once. Osman thinks he knows about, and probably yearns for, the ways of the West. Constanze is sorely tempted by the free sensuality of the East. And the Pasha himself is not even a Turk. For reasons never really ex-

plained, he has renounced Christianity and wholeheartedly adopted the values of Islam. Pedrillo may assure Constanze a lover Belmonte that the master of the harem "is not so out-and-out Turk and still has enough delicacy not to force his love on any woman". But Elijah Moshinsky's production shows that the Pasha, who has given Constanze twenty-four hours before he makes love to her, is really playing a sadistic game of cat and mouse – a game all the more subtle because of its combination of Western refinement and uninhibited oriental profligacy. "Do you not tremble before the power I wield over you?" he asks. During the notoriously long instrumental prelude to "Märtern aller Arten", he breaks his promise and starts to fondle her before the twenty-four hours are up. As Oliver Tobias plays the Pasha like a ravishingly handsome lizard tempting Constanze away from her stalwart and (in this performance) less than winsome lover Belmonte, we understand what she means by "tortures".

But despite one or two good moments, Moshinsky's interpretation badly misfires. Part of the problem is the set, a silly combination of realism, artifice and impression. The Pasha's palace, designed by Timothy O'Brien, is a sunny, ramshackle country house with a nice little orchard somewhere in Asia Minor, complete with the sounds of crickets and the sea in the background. Mozart and his audience are unlikely to have had such a dozy notion of the East; yet Moshinsky places it in the context of an eighteenth-century theatre, and adds seven stage-cloths by Sidney Nolan for good measure, five of which are yanked across the stage at odd moments "to evoke the Asiatic atmosphere appropriate to the opera".

Another problem is the musical performance. If Mozart's letters to his father are anything to go by, he enjoyed himself hugely with this marvellous score. But you would never guess from this lacklustre rendering of it. Sir Georg Solti's tempi are lively, yet at the same time too rigid. On the first night an indisposed Inga Nielsen fought a losing battle with the taxing part of Constanze. Deon van der Velt as Belmonte and Lars Magnusson as Pedrillo simply lacked profile and a sense of style. The indomitable Kurt Moll as Osman was enjoyable at times, but sounded surprisingly weary, with some unfocused low notes and sluggish timing. The only bright spark was Lillian Watson as Blonde. Yet even she was dragged down by the indifference of the performance. I began to wonder by the end of the evening whether Covent Garden's bastardization of *Die Entführung* in 1827, for all its superficial topicality, might not have been livelier. "This Turkey is not threatening the gates of the Habsburg empire", the programme book tells us. The only trouble is that, apart from the occasional glimmer, it doesn't seem to be threatening to do anything at all.

Part of the flattening effect of the television series comes from the evident cheapness of the production. Shot entirely on video-tape, with unimaginative lighting and drab studio sets, *The London Embassy* has the appearance and feel of an international *Crossroads*. But the main weakness is in the characters. Vic Scudov, played by Lou Hirsch, and Erroll Jeeps (Erik Ray Evans) have been transformed into the kind of easily identifiable cultural stereotypes beloved of soap opera. Scudov is the fat, voluble Italian-American, always eating and forever embroiled in family squabbles. Jeeps is the cool, laid-back black, fond of sharp suits, funky jazz and one-liners. The central character, Spencer Savage is well played by Kristoffer Tabori looking like a young Robert Redford, though his role has inevitably been hollowed out by dramatization. In the book it is Savage's oblique commentary which gives the stories their distinctive tone. On screen this is reduced to a quizzical smile that hovers between complicity and condescension. Like all good short stories, Theroux's tales of embassy life rely on timing and pace. It's disappointing to see them turned into this faltering trot through the cultural clichés.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS
The Bohemian Mrs Bland

Claire Tomalin

JULIA BRIGGS
A Woman of Passion: The life of E. Nesbit
1858-1924
473pp. Century Hutchinson. £16.95.
009 168210 X

We, and our daughters, and our nieces – and perhaps a few sons and nephews – have all read *The Railway Children*, *The Story of the Amulet*, *The Treasure Seekers*, *The Would-be-goods*, *The Phoenix and the Carpet*. Written at the turn of the century, they were hugely popular with children and adults, admired by writers as various as Kipling and Wells, and have remained in print ever since. They have been filmed, televised and of course paperbacked; it's a rare household in which books figure at all which cannot muster a battered Nesbit Puffin or two. Their recurring theme of lost and found fathers addresses itself to children's deepest fears and hopes (and during two world wars it spoke to their common experience). Another theme, that of the wish granted that turns out to be awkward or frightening, goes straight to the heart of the fantasies and semi-conscious terrors of many children. Subsequent writers have learnt from their triumphant mixture of the magical and the down-to-earth, which children take to so readily.

Despite her androgynous name, E. Nesbit's readers knew very well that she was a mother herself; she once wrote a letter to the *New Age* magazine, which had been running articles on the horrors of childbearing and brutal lack of consideration of husbands, insisting that most women are devoted to their husbands and adore having babies. The picture of a loving mother, drawing charmingly on her observations of her own large family for her stories, seemed to fit.

This comfortably maternal image was strongly established and important to her. As Julia Briggs writes, "in her books, as in her correspondence with her admirers, [she] showed herself anxious to conform to their comforting picture of her"; and when Doris Langley Moore came to write a biography of the much-loved author in 1933, she felt she simply could not make use of a great deal of the material she had gathered in the course of her extremely thorough research. Nesbit had died in 1924, but it would still have caused too much offence, not only to her surviving family, but to her devoted readers.

Mrs Langley Moore's gift of her notebooks and research material to Julia Briggs, fully and warmly acknowledged by her, was indeed an act of generosity; it is also a rather singular occurrence in the annals of biography, this gift from one biographer to another of material she herself felt obliged to set aside. The results are to everyone's credit. This is a wonderfully solid, thorough and balanced book. The story it tells is consistently interesting and at mo-

ments extraordinary, and although some of the true facts of the Nesbit / Bland household have been known since Mrs Langley Moore's revised *Life* of 1966, the picture presented by Julia Briggs is still fuller and franker.

Edith Nesbit – "Daisy" to her family – was born in 1858 in Kennington, now part of the grey, undifferentiated mass of South London, but then still countryside, with flower-edged lanes and farms. She was the youngest, a fact Mrs Briggs thinks important, for she craved all her life the attention and petting that goes to the baby of a large family. There was a much older step-sister by her mother's first marriage, a sister and two brothers. The death of her father when she was four marked her imagination indelibly; but her twice-widowed mother was intelligent and resourceful, and gave her orphaned children a good upbringing. There were visits to the Crystal Palace with its dinosaur park, to the British Museum and Madame Tussaud's (both of which Edith continued to love in her adult years); there were schools, mostly hateful because they meant banishment from family life, but then restoration to the family when Mrs Nesbit decided to take them all to France. The chief reason for this was the tuberculosis from which Edith's sister Minnie was suffering, for which travel abroad was believed to be a palliative.

Apart from one terrifying experience when her sisters took her to see the catacombs of Bordeaux with their hideously preserved, hairy corpses (still very horrible, according to Julia Briggs, who most conscientiously repeated the visit), France was idyllic, remembered and revisited with joy thereafter. It did not, however, cure Minnie. Leaving Edith at school in Dinan, Mrs Nesbit took her sick daughter back to London where the doomed girl made friends with Christina Rossetti, and became engaged to a blind Pre-Raphaelite poet, Philip Murston, only to die a few months later. (The whole incident resembles a ghastly parody of Christina Rossetti's narrative poetry at its most morbid.)

By now Edith had become a poet too. She longed to be great, "like Shakespeare, or Christina Rossetti", but she knew that in reality she wrote "like other people". She was however persistent and prolific, and soon began to be published in magazines. The Nesbits settled in Kent, in a big, rambling house, but during the 1870s they seem to have lost their money; they disappear and bob up again in Islington, where Edith met her future husband, Hubert Bland.

Bland is one of the minor enigmas of literary history in that everything reported of him makes him sound repellent, yet he was admired, even adored, by many intelligent men and women. A quick, clever Woolwich lad whose family was unable to buy him the commission he craved, he became, briefly, a bank clerk. While still living with his mother (he was also a spoilt youngest child) he invented aristocratic Yorkshire forebears, at the same time becoming a keen socialist for a



E. Nesbit and her son John in 1904, from the book reviewed here.

while, and then a founding Fabian. He did not aspire to be consistent. He allowed his wife to support him with her pen for some years, but was always opposed to feminism.

Woman's *métier* in the world – I mean, of course, civilized woman, the woman in the world as it is – to inspire romantic passion . . . Romantic passion is inspired by women who wear corsets. In other words, by the women who pretend to be what they are not quite are.

Corset-wearing women were never lacking, and he had a voracious sexual appetite. When Edith met him he had a mistress already with child, and she herself was seven months pregnant before he married her. No sooner did she introduce a housekeeper, Alice Hoatson, into their establishment, than he proceeded to father children on both her and Edith regularly. In mid-life he joined the Catholic church, a further cosmetic touch to his old-world image, but without modifying his behaviour or even bothering to attend more than a minimum of masses. By then he had become a hugely successful journalist with a particular following in the north of England, his column in the Manchester *Sunday Chronicle* proving so popular that it gave him a secure income for life.

Whatever the lesson to be learnt from bogus Bland, when Edith met him, she saw the ardent, handsome, poetry-loving young man, the great talker who was to persuade Bernard Shaw to his first Fabian meeting and who

seemed an ideal literary collaborator. Even when he had come to seem less ideal, he was still the only person who could talk her out of her "highlights" – the black moments that descended on her when she had too much to do, or when she felt slighted; they enveloped the entire household, and only Hubert could relieve the misery. It is scarcely surprising that she was subject to them, on a diet of ceaseless hawk work to pay the hutchers' and baker's bills – a formidable bibliography attests to this – plus pregnancies leading to several stillbirths as well as three living children and, on top of this, an unrequited passion for Shaw.

"Unrequited" is not exactly the right term, for Shaw did initially get in quite deeply, as his notebook entries, with their little accounts of shillings and pence, show. For a while there were taxis and first-class carriages when Mrs Nesbit was in question (the extra fare might ensure privacy); these are followed by the usual Shavian manoeuvres of hasty, determined disengagement. She suffered, and held it against him; and he felt *something* – if not remorse, at least enough to lead him, years later, to pay a contribution towards her stepson John's university education. The two best, wildest, strongest letters in this book were both from Shaw; his power to upstage all his women friends posthumously would have pleased the old fox infinitely, no doubt.

Shaw was of course a feminist, while Edith wanted love; the two things are a puzzle to fit together even when one partner is not reluctant. But for a while Edith found the way of life that suited her, and inspiration too, according to Mrs Briggs, when, about the year 1890, she met a young journalist called Oswald Barron who began to collaborate with her. He was one of a band of her "courtiers", recent Oxford graduates who joined the Fabian Society and were fascinated by the Blands, and notably by Edith. For she was beautiful in her own style – lots of hair and a strong face, trailing Liberty dresses, ropes of beads and dozens of bangles on her arm, incessant cigarettes in a long holder – and the parties she and Hubert gave were famous all over the house.

Julia Briggs credits Edith with a very large number of "lovers" among the young men who gathered about her, some acting as her secretary, more joining in family holidays in Kent or in France. It is never clear whether they were lovers in the modern sense, and while perhaps it does not matter too much, the picture of Nesbit is undoubtedly changed if she was holding court like Messalinn, or on the other hand simply receiving sentimental homage. Whichever was the case, Edith enjoyed the adulation of many young men, but Barron gave her something more; he was erudite, possessed a historical imagination, and "his way of looking at the world came to colour hers strongly". Barron acted, says Mrs Briggs, as her "muse or midwife"; and of course she gave his name to Oswald Bastable. Sadly, when he married in 1899 he walked out of her life without a back-

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Penned and painted

Jane Doonan

The *Yellow House* belongs to the English picture-book tradition, with cohesive unity between words and pictures, a fine old-fashioned graphic style, and a general air of reticence. Blake Morrison's narrative, which sustains readings on different levels, is about the transforming power of the imagination. A little girl, who is fascinated by a sad old yellow house, clambers over the gate when her mother's back is turned. She discovers the garden to be full of unexpected delights, but is unable to enter the house itself. She is guided, encouraged, and thwarted by a friendly garden-gnome of a boy, who suddenly vanishes. Secure in her belief in his return, she now finds the house presents a happy aspect: "one day he'll be there again calling me in to play". Helen Craig's aquatint etchings vigorously denote such surprises as a pelican in the tree and a dolphin in the pond. They exemplify the mystery of the child's experience by using colour, not to decorate, but to heighten the expression, and by two different ways of depicting space. On the plates, Craig uses geometric perspective to give the illusion of reality. On the text pages she overlaps images, and by placing the girl in front of the framed works (which we perceive as lying on the picture plane) and placing the boy behind, she emphasizes his elusive otherness. The whole book, with its grey binding, thick matt creamy paper, and etchings - neither an easy nor a quick process - has a distinguished and cared-for quality which maintains that children deserve something beautiful and rare.

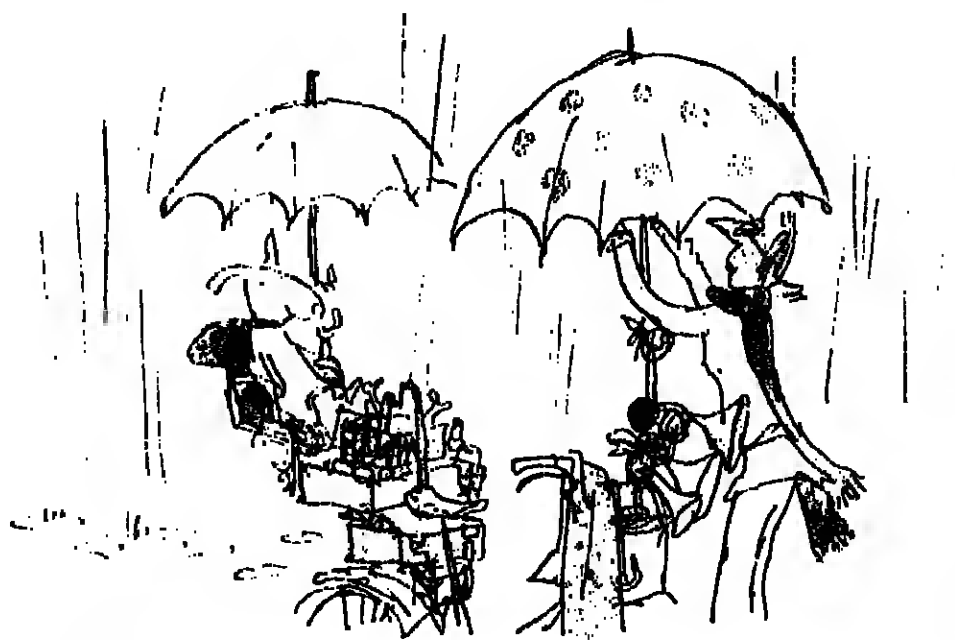
Jane Hissey follows up last year's successful *Old Bear* with a new picture book which displays fine imagination. Little Bear's trousers are missing. When Little Bear goes questing he finds they have been put to some ill-concocted uses by his friends. Dug carried bones in them. Rabbit wore them as ear muffs, and they are discovered doubling as a twin-nozzled icing-sugar bag. Hissey offers her young readers an entirely credible nursery microcosm which is funny because it takes itself so seriously. The toys pass their time purposefully and talk in the genuine tones of daily conversation. The visual narrative is full of ingenuity and felicitous detail: one character gets so carried away with enthusiasm that he decorates the text-page and toys, as well as the cake. Hissey's crayon drawings, with their peculiar quality of non-photographic realism, are concerned with the texture of objects, inviting long scrutiny of fuzzy felt toys and glistening jam.

Through Susan Jeffers's powers of interpretation, *The Midnight Farm* is a gentle progression from disturbed waking to sleeping worlds, as well as a counting book. A bedroom curtain flutters; and a mother describes to her child what they would see if they went for a walk around the farm. Time and creatures move naturally. Late day turns to midnight, the story-child becomes increasingly tired and has to be carried. A cat wanders from one place and page to another; the owl is poised, the mice scamper. When the story ends, both worlds

have merged, the child sleeps contentedly. The overall sense of design is admirable. Spaciousness and drama are treated with restraint. Unworked areas balance intricate passages, and the batching models the images and settles the picture on the page. Colour is warm and dusky within doors, silvered without. Reeve Lindbergh's verse supplies the cues for numbering. More animals to count come in Mick Inkpen's *One Bear at Bedtime* but in a very different style. Inkpen has a warm sense of humour and ability as a draughtsman, but he is a little too sweet with his images, all charm and pastel hues. However the device of a roly-poly boy needing only one bear but imagining a whole

dazzle. Audrey Wood and Don Wood's picture book comes from the United States, having already won two American awards.

Art history continues to be a rich source for picture-book artists. Mike Dickinson's *Smudge* is a fidgety boy who drops out of an impressionist painting and chases round a museum trying to find alternative accommodation in the art and artefacts of 4,000 years of culture. Repelled by Achilles, attacked by Anubis, chased off by cherubs for waking up the baby, harassed at Hastings, spooked by a mummy and bared by a Moore, he finally becomes a happy Smudge in a Lowry. It's a genuinely funny idea. More penned with a brush



Mrs Armitage weatherproofing her bicycle for the benefit of her dog Breakpear, from Mrs Armitage on Wheels by Quentin Blake, the history of a designer bike and its only modified success, (Cape, £5.95, 024 8177).

menagerie is beguiling. High jinks with bed-bouncing kangaroos and crocodiles who waste toothpaste are temporarily lulled by a little puzzle concerning nine missing caterpillars as an added bonus.

Both the cumulative rhyme and the colour begin quietly in *The Napping House*. As its occupants pile onto the same bed, so the visual jukes increase with the turning of the pages. The bed breaks, the sleepers catapult into the air, and colour explodes in electrifying Dayglo

than painted, mixed styles and mixed media treat aesthetic objects with knockabout insouciance.

Five Secrets in a Box equates art with beauty and treats it quite differently. While Galileo sleeps, his young daughter Virginia creeps into his study, to discover four lenses and a feather: dangerous playthings in Galileo's hands, innocent in hers. Despite the biographical notes on the endpaper, the irony and implications are likely to be lost on young readers; neither does

the first-person narrator find a convincing "voice" or seem sure of her audience. It's a brave try which just fails to come off, leaving a picture book of well-researched and interesting paintings. Catherine Brighton's pictorial style owes much to the seventeenth-century Dutch art of describing. Intricately patterned fabrics press against the picture plane, while behind, space unrolls across tiled floors, and succeeding vistas are revealed through open doorways and casements. Light reflects off scientific instruments and carved furniture. With wit and intelligence Brighton breaks the earlier pictorial conventions for her own expressive purpose by introducing bold changes of eye-level, scale and viewpoint, which give heart of the past the immediacy of the present.

By comparison, *The Boy Who Held Back the Sea* is truly a record of Dutch disasters. Still in the seventeenth century, presumably intended for the junior connoisseur, the story is pretentiously illustrated by Thomas Locker in plates hinting at de Hooch, resembling Ruysdael, seeming Sacredam, and with a guest appearance of "The Night Watch". Lenny Hort's text is dull and condescending. At the height of the drama, artist and writer fall apart as one depicts a peg-legged pirate and the other describes his approaching footsteps.

On cue for Christmas, in a series of richly painted theatrical colour plates, *The Little Match Girl* (in an unattributed translation) portrays a well-nourished child posed in and around Quality Street, cunningly lit to give the illusion of life. Snow falls to pretty effect. Rachel Isadora's glamorized images distance us too comfortably from Andersen's starveling and her transcendental violons.

Blake Morrison: *The Yellow House*. Illustrated by Helen Craig. Walker, £6.95, 0 7445 0414 7.
Jane Hissey: *Little Bear's Trousers*. Century Hutchinson, £5.95, 0 09 172140 7.
Reeve Lindbergh: *The Midnight Farm*. Illustrated by Susan Jeffers. Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12303 8.
Mike Dickinson: *One Bear at Bedtime: A counting book*. Hodder and Stoughton, £4.95, 0 340 41317 4.
Audrey Wood: *The Napping House*. Illustrated by Don Wood. Dent, £5.50, 0 460 06277 8.
Mike Dickinson: *Smudge*. Deutsch, £5.50, 0 233 98033 9.

Catherine Brighton: *Five Secrets in a Box*. Methuen, £5.95, 0 416 00302 8.
Lenny Hort: *The Boy Who Held Back the Sea*. Illustrated by Thomas Locker. Cape, £6.50, 0 224 02514 7.

Rans Christian Andersen: *The Little Match Girl*. Illustrated by Rachel Isadora. Hodder and Stoughton, £5.95, 0 340 41443 X.

Extraordinary and everyday

Kate Flint

JILL MURPHY
All in One Piece
Walker, £5.95,
0 745 0749 9

PHILIPPA PEARCE
Emily's Own Elephant
Illustrated by John Lawrence
Julia MacRae, £5.95,
0 86203 318 7

ANNALENA MCAFEE
Kirsty Knows Best
Illustrated by Anthony Browne
Julia MacRae, £5.95,
0 86203 289 X

In *All in One Piece*, Jill Murphy introduces a large, lively, and socially conventional family of elephants. Mr and Mrs Large prepare to go to the office dinner-dance, deftly using the trunk-tip to knot the striped tie, dangling earrings from the long grey lobes, and painting the toe-rails a delicate pink. Granny comes to look after the young elephants, but she is powerless to prevent them sneering themselves with paint and make-up, and stretching their mother's already voluminous new tights with their collection of toys. They woefully hang their trunks when Mrs Large explodes at them, demanding her one night of freedom in the year as she and her husband leave the house, however, the neat squares of paint on her bottom, left from where she injudiciously sat down on a paint box, are brightly conspicuous. Murphy has a deft command of endearing elephant expressions, conceals well the con-

fortably untidy family home, down to the details of the spreading shaving foam in the bathroom, the elephant's head door-knocker and the children's first drawings of their own species. Noce the less, this family, tamed in striped jerseys, starry pyjamas and an evening dress that looks as if it has been borrowed from Miss Piggy, are depressingly trapped within suburbia. Rather than our being taken into an elephant world, they are brought entirely within our own.

The miniature specimen in Philippa Pearce's *Emily's Own Elephant*, equally sweet in expression, at least is granted his own shed, stream and paddock, even if social roles are once again reinforced by its being Emily's mother who bakes the all-essential buns, and her father who sets about installing do-it-yourself central heating to the elephant's new home. The elephant has been rescued from the zoo, which, with an unaccountable blind spot when it comes to making commercial capital out of a novelty, has allowed Emily and her family to adopt the animal. The story's incoherence comes not in the methodical and considerate treatment Jumbo receives but in the visual characterization of Emily. First, she appears a proficient water-colourist, sketching the abandoned shed in the family meadow, then she sketches to an enthusiastic rabbit-stroker and goat-feeder in the children's kitchen; and later reappears as a long-legged nymph, making garlands of roses for her pos. John Lawrence's wistful illustrations are in the manner of Ardizzone but lack his rebelliousness, whether treating children or animals, and they weaken this pleasant if unexceptional story. Far more imaginatively evocative than either

of these books is Annalena McAfee and Anthony Browne's splendid *Kirsty Knows Best*. Outwardly an unattractive and unpopular child, to say the least, Kirsty uses her day-dreaming to transform her environment, and understands that others do the same. She knows that her mother, working as a supermarket cashier, escapes to nothing so mundane as a dinner-dance, but becomes the famed, squinted guest singer, Joyce Little, Superstar. Her unemployed father, pottering in his garden shed, is a megalomaniac inventor, whose flying dogs, indeed flying elephants, will feed his Napoleonic image of himself conquering the world through science. Kirsty's own world is metamorphosed. A princess, she sleeps in a four-poster with Hilliard's Unknown Young Man as her pin-up; breakfast becomes a party with paper hats and Battenburg cake; Nora, the sneering school bully, is suddenly removed to a willow-pattern plate to provide Kirsty's transport to school: "To get round town she does adore her Little rickshaw pulled by Nora." Even prose becomes poetry in daydreams. The school classroom (itself is revived as Kirsty drifts into reverie. A cat chases a mouse and pandering bird right out of the picture on the wall; amorphous lumps and shadows reveal themselves as gorilla and rhino; the dull streets outside become a palm-fringed beach and the window pole a boat-hook. Better yet, Kirsty wranks further revenge on Nasty Nora. Her plump body, in its unflattering green school uniform, swells and puffs up like a load of the tide explodes. Immaculately executed, *Kirsty Knows Best* is an excellent example of how the extraordinary may be brought into the everyday, and subvert, rather than reinforce, its values.

Spirit friends

Jan Dalley

HELEN CRESSWELL
Moondial
214pp. Faber, £6.95,
0 571 14805 0
JEAN RICHARDSON (Editor)
Beware! Beware! Chilling tales
224pp. Hamish Hamilton, £6.95,
0 241 12104 3

The idea that we invented God because we needed Him might perhaps hold equally true of ghosts. In many of these stories, the spirit world answers an earthly need, providing the catalyst in a trauma of loss or death, for example; or a foil in the search for identity; or simple companionship for a lonely child; or unlike the imaginary friend children often invent for themselves.

In *Moondial*, Minty Crane's widowed mother sends her to spend the holidays with a aunt who lives in a cottage close to Beltoo House, a National Trust property. There will be plenty of children for her to play with, they tell her. In the event, the companion she finds is Tom, an orphan boy who works in the kitchen of the great house. He has come to the country from London, where he was forced to leave his little sister, Dorrie, picking scraps from the gutter. His ambition is to grow six feet tall, so that he can become a footman and bring Dorrie to live with him, but the violent coughing that racks his skinny frame makes that seem unlikely.

Tom was, of course, alive 100 years before Minty. They meet by means of the moondial, whose magic can suspend time. Together they use the moondial's power to go back another 100 years, to discover the secret of the eerie singing, and sometimes sobbing, they hear across the centuries. They find Sarah, a sad, hooded child who comes out only at night, when she is haunted by packs of eyeless figures because she carries "the devil's mark" on her face.

Meanwhile, back in "real" time, Minty's mother has had a car crash and is lying uncon-

scious in hospital. Minty's efforts to reach her, locked away as she seems to be on the other side of some mysterious divide, are mirrored by her attempts to reach and understand the worlds of Tom and of Sarah, as she manages to shatter the web of evil that holds the ghost-children in thrall to their unhappy lives she also makes contact with her mother and brings her back to conscious life.

Moondial is beautifully structured and manages skilfully to weave together the factual with the supernatural. Minty and Tom are each invisible in the other's era, and the picture of a servant-boy's life in the 1870s is powerful enough to overcome any doubts about time-travel. Similarly, the poignancy of Tom and Dorrie's fate avoids sentimentality. The book is a fine achievement by this very experienced author.

The nine stories that make up *Beware! Beware!* are variable in quality, but the most interesting of them continue *Moondial*'s theme of linking the spirit world with recognizable human emotions. In "The Spring", by Peter Dickinson, a child's search for identity is answered by a ghostly twin. In "The Road Home", by Jean Richardson, the strange confusion of a foggy night lends Susan past the family house she grew up in, and allows her for the first time to grieve for the deaths of her mother, father and brother in an air accident. And Berlie Doherty's "Nightmare" has at its centre so eerie walk on the moors - or was it a dream? - at the very point of the winter solstice, the time when the year dies and nothing moves.

The best (and scariest) of the scary stories in this book is Jane Gardam's "Bang, Bang - Who's Dead?" She gives us a traditional child-ghost, a little girl in pinafore and black stockings who plays in the garden of an old house and who confronts the thoroughly modern Fran, in bar jeans and white T-shirt.

No clear theme runs through *Beware! Beware!*, beyond the apparently universal delight in spine-tingling stories. But the warning in the title (and to stories such as Jane Gardam's) seems to alert the reader to the fact that, whether we've invented them or not, ghosts can get the upper hand.

Across the ravine

Anne Duchêne

GILLIAN CROSS
Roscoe's Leap
360pp. Oxford University Press, £6.95,
0 19 271557 7

Roscoe's Leap - one might as well say it at once - goes well over the top. It begins with beguiling audacity. The Roscoes live in a folly, confidently described by Gillian Cross as it appears in Pevsner: "built in 1879 for Samuel Roscoe, the millionaire sewage contractor" on "an iron framework and the main parts of the structure are of poured and shuttered concrete with dressings of York stone". It rises "in irregular clusters of Neo-Gothic turrets" on two sides of a small but appreciable ravine, spanned by a gallery of glass and cast iron.

In the buildings on one side, Hannah and Stephen live with their mother in an extreme of genteel poverty. Servantless, they eat small meals off Royal Worcester and Crown Derby, wash their glasses to three waters, and restore cutlery to "the plate safe in the butler's pantry". Mother, "small and thin and very, very straight", is given to emotional blackmail. On the other side of the ravine live Uncle Ernest, a moody, grimy monolith in a wheelchair, and Doug, who appears to be his minder so doddle and placatory, and yet so much given to the heavy breathing of stifled emotion that one braces oneself for fashionable revelations about child-molesting. He turns out, however, to be the children's father, who has not communicated with their mother for eight years, since something very traumatic happened.

Relations across the ravine are therefore pretty tense. Hannah, a forthright girl with a penchant for mending machinery - "nothing as mind-blowingly beautiful as a

machine", is how her thoughts are expressed - realizes that Uncle Ernest pays the boarding-school fees, but often longs for a definitive row, "even if it meant going to ordinary schools and living in some beastly flat".

So far, so unlikely; but one accepts it. Action is initiated by a likeable unwitting innocent called Nick Honeyball, who is researching a thesis on the sewage millionaire and "social mobility". He is instrumental in re-starting the Roscoe collection of mechanical toys, and notably a late eighteenth-century enactment of the French Revolution, where life-size automata circulate and guillotine themselves.

This releases atrocious memories which Stephen, now twelve, has been suppressing for eight years. Everything becomes, in detail, blurred and difficult to follow - much messing about on mysteriously half-cleared driveways; and searches for missing counter-weights - but is resolved in a climax of high melodrama over the ravine. Stephen becomes brave, and Doug, we gather, is going to have to live happily ever after again with Mother.

Gillian Cross is demonstrably very able; but here she has set herself too many jumps too close together. Her naturally commanding manner does, indeed, increasingly suggest a riding-mistress, alternately bossy and matey, buckling round an ill-set circuit on a clumsy pony: one may admire her hands, her seat, her turn-out, but one really cannot applaud the performance. Even her bracing prose runs ragged at times (as when Nick, whose question has been received evasively, "was too polite to ask the question again, seeing it had met with such a ravenously enthusiastic response" - this comes of trying to write on both sides of the fence at once, as it were). It is something of a curate's egg of a book, as a result - very good in parts, but much too hard-boiled. The adly true little story at its heart, about human misunderstanding and pain, needs more space, and time, in which to be developed.

Magic in the wood

Rosamond McKitterick

WILLIAM MAYNE
The Blenyah Stories
Illustrated by Juan Wijngaard
72pp. Walker, £14.95,
0 7445 0607 7

Harmony of text and illustration is a hallmark of medieval illuminated manuscripts, as it is of a good children's book, and it is late medieval Books of Hours which have inspired William Mayne the storyteller and Juan Wijngaard the artist in their *Blenyah Stories*. Not only is the setting of the story a medieval monastery and the making of the misericords in the monks' choir-stalls; but the structure of the book too and its sequence of illustrations resemble those of a Book of Hours. Mayne and Wijngaard have created beautiful full-page and half-page illustrations; the former to depict the main theme of each story and the latter to preface each chapter with a portrait of the Priory Kirk; it has a great horse-chestnut tree in its meadow which changes with the rhythm of the seasons. The twelve stories encompass the cycle of the months of the year.

To the Priory Kirk at the year's beginning come the Blenyahs - Sir, Dame his wife, Lad their son and Eame, Dame's brother. Like the men in Sir John Mandeville's *Travels* these beings are "short, but not too wide. In their shoulders are their eyes; in their chests their noses grow; their smile is at their stomach; and they sit straight down on their chins". Their potentially fearsome aspect is counteracted by the benevolence of their expressions and their resemblance to their own wood carvings. It is they who come to carve the seats in the choir stalls of Priory Kirk. The Blenyahs know the secrets of the wood and who is hidden within.

They uncover the Three Kings, Noah's Ark, a hen and her brood of chicks, the fox and the geese, the hare, a bagpipe-playing monkey, Adam and Eve, the shearing of the sheep, the

yeoman hunting with his goshawk, "girling" faces of gargoyles, the sow, boar and unicorn, and the Nativity.

Mischief too is released from the wood in the form of Ruffin. Lad carves him out from a lumpy piece of wood, "the clodd where branches start, too big to waste". It is Ruffin who is the anti-hero of the stories. He likes to try to be bad, and be sometimes succeeds. His skirmishes with Tybert, the Prior's cat are fun, and his best joke is to put "girmog faces" on the soles of all the monks' new clogs so that their footprints jeer at them after they have passed by. This element of mischief is delightfully reflected in the abundance of marginal illustrations throughout the text. On Rope Monday, the spiders dancing in the church "fall on books of tunes and look like melody. Brothers sing ugly notes with eight legs". In the pictures the Brothers dance on bell ropes. But Ruffin's badness hurts. In each story the revelling in fuss and naughtiness is tempered with Ruffin's dissatisfaction, and his sense that all is not quite right. He wants to touch things to spoil them and make them bad, but in the Midwinter story, the climax of the book, it is the Bobby who reaches out and touches Ruffin. "At once Ruffin feels his sickly badness drop from him. He feels he has been freshly made of straight new wood, no knots or shakes, no cross or twisted grain." It is another Christmas miracle but one that conveys complete conviction.

The book has great charm and beauty, but never falls into whimsy or falseness. Its prose style seems at first rather odd, but within a page or two the magic of the book, its language and its pictures, are already working, and the strangeness of the tale and the poetic forms with which it is told weave their own distinctive spell. Children with imagination will enjoy this book and their sense of fun and anarchy will be delighted at the drawings and at Ruffin's pranks. There is a sense of being on the brink of enchantment where things unreal become real, but in no threatening manner, which children and adults alike will find enticing.

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Coming to terms

Alice H. G. Phillips

PAM CONRAD
Holding Me Here
184pp. Oxford University Press. £5.95.
019 2715801

Some broken homes are more dramatic than others. Two years ago, Robin Lewis's parents separated amicably, and her father moved a short train ride away. Now thirteen, Robin lives in the big suburban house with her youthful working mother and visits her father in New York frequently; her parents worry only that she has taken the divorce "too well". But when Mrs Lewis lets Robin's old playroom, it is taken by a refugee from a different kind of failed marriage. Mary Walker claims to be a spinster, but Robin discovers that she has abandoned a husband and two children in a not very distant town.

In a reversal of the old plot of parents reading their offspring's diary, horrified and fascinated, the teenager here reads about the adult's hidden emotional life, pities her, and vows to make everything all right again. There are other secrets in *Holding Me Here*, bugging waitress and suspense into the general atmosphere of loving openness that Robin's mother tries to sustain. Mr Walker, it turns out, beat his wife - one of the most hushed-up crimes - and is also an alcoholic, mother avidly concealing and denied problem. Mary hides from her husband and self-protectively lies about her past to her landlady and the landlady's daughter, who keeps from both her parents her plan for reuniting the Walkers. Robin's mother has been doing some withholding of her own, as she guiltily admits soon after Mary's arrival: she has been dating for the past year without Robin's knowledge. She gives up

to explain that she wants to have privacy but not secrets from her daughter. Robin nods, but feels semi-justified in her own evasions.

A mixture of teenage cool and responsiveness, Robin is the ideal narrator for the book's two tales of loss and coming-to-terms. She is affected by but not sentimental over the plight of Mary and her daughter and son; in fact, it stimulates her ingenuity. And she is convincingly blind to the element of wish-fulfilment in her desire to bring the Walker family back together. Picturing herself as a "fairy god-mother in jeans and a ski jacket", she meddles, with disastrous results, in a highly charged situation. Mary materializes in a blond nurse's uniform and hisses, "You have ruined everything, you miserable child", and her husband later breaks into the house in an alcoholic rage, in search of her. These events combine to impress on Robin the depths of some problems, and of her own misdoings, however well-intentioned. Responsible adults, Pam Conrad gently but firmly implies, do sometimes know better than their children, and contemplate long-range solutions obscure to impatient youth.

In complementary scenes with her own parents, Robin comes to understand that polite dissimulation was for all of them as painful as the Walkers' violent sundering. The knowledge, like a funeral, brings a needed sense of closure, and Mr's boyfriend and Mr Lewis's bachelor life begin to look like the future, rather than temporary makeshifts. The Walkers' story is, realistically, left unresolved, a dark memory for Robin to carry into adulthood.

Pam Conrad's previous novel for young adults, *Prarie Song*, won an American Library Association award, and her new book is full of real issues, honest feeling and good plain writing, nothing facile or slick. Hers is a voice that young teenagers will trust.

Putting it all together

Deborah Singmaster

VIRGINIA HAMILTON
Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush
215pp. Walker Books. £8.95.
07445 08061

In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (first published in the United States in 1982) the award-winning American writer Virginin Hamilton has forsaken the expansive settings of her earlier novels. There is nothing here for the M. C. Higgins swinging on his pole over the Appalachian Hills, or the Great Snake Race in *Jasmine and Her Brothers*. The story - strictly for older teenagers - is confined to a city apartment, a hospital, a crematorium, and focuses on "poor folks' reality; black reality, you want to give it a title". The themes it touches on sound like the headings in a social worker's manual: bereavement, child abuse, drugs, inherited disease, latch-key children, mental handicap, racial prejudice, the single parent, suicide. All these issues affect the life of Tree (Teresa) who lives alone with her elder, mentally handicapped brother, Dab; their mother, M'Vy is away most of the time "for a lot of reasons. She worked; she lived in at people's houses. She was into practical nursing."

The novel begins when Tree falls in love with a "duke" she sees standing on the street corner, dressed to kill. "The stone finest dude Tree had ever seen in her short life of going-on fifteen years." This beautiful creature reappears in Tree's apartment and turns out to be the ghost of her uncle, Brother Rush. As the novel's *deus ex machina*, Rush takes Tree on a series of voyages through time back to her forgotten infancy where she learns things pleasant and unpleasant about her past. The

most painful discovery is her mother's ill-treatment of young Dab. Later, near the end of the novel, Brother Rush helps Tree to accept the next tragedy that awaits her, but his chief function is to make her start asking questions. "If you never told there's some answers, how you gone to know the questions?" pleads Tree. Brother Rush provides her with several answers.

Dab's collapse from an attack of congenital porphyria, brought on by drugs, coincides with one of M'Vy's rare visits. During the nightmare dash to hospital with the dying boy, Tree is racked with conflicting emotions of terror for her brother, and ecstasy at being in a car for the first time and meeting M'Vy's handsome new boyfriend, Silversmith. M'Vy's collision with bureaucracy at the hospital Reception is magnificently written and creates lip-biting tension.

When Dab dies Tree turns on her mother in a frenzy of forgivable hatred. It is only because Miss Hamilton is a compassionate writer that M'Vy retains our sympathy, and, ultimately, Tree's. She offers no excuses for her failure to love her son other than her extreme youth at the time of his birth. She admits that she has made mistakes but she is determined to put things right. "I'm gone put it all together one day," she vows. We believe her.

Throughout this moving novel runs the wistful refrain "Everything going to be okay", and after the agony of Dab's death it looks as if this may well be true. An old bag lady, Miss Prichard, is installed to take care of Tree - a slatternly cleaning woman earlier in the story, she is now transformed by a uniform and a bath into a cosy Peggotty figure; Silversmith is all set to become a permanent father substitute and his son Don, a suitable handsome eighteen year old, is eager to start dating Tree. It all seems a little too good to be true.

CATHERINE ROBINSON, *Lizzie Oliver*. 208pp. Macdonald. £1.95. 0 356 1199 63. First published 1987. *Lizzie's* thirteen year proves traumatic. With the gully knowledge that the memory of her mother's face is beginning to fade (she was killed two years earlier in a car crash), Lizzie's grief turns to confused rage when her father marries "Miss Bullock" - never, never will she be "Wendy" - and she is uprooted from her beloved Cornish cliffs to live in an affluent London suburb. She tells her own story in a lively, confiding way, full of revealing details, as she combats her nastier self to come to terms with her new life. A vigorously satisfying story for girls. (10-13.)

NAOMI LEWIS, *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales*. Illustrated by Philip Gough. 175pp. Puffin. £1.95. 0 14 035085 3. First published 1981. There can never be too many reprints of this collection of twelve tales, newly translated and accompanied by an illuminating short biography of Andersen, with notes on each story. Other Puffin Classics are: Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (222pp. £1.95. 0 14 035080 2. First published 1899) which, I fear, must be totally bewildering to most modern young readers, and *The Second Jungle Book* (233pp. £1.95. 0 14 035079 9. First published 1895), more about humans and less familiar than the first *Jungle Book*, but whose exotic rhythms will never lose their appeal; and *Introducing Doctor Dolittle*, by Hugh Lofting (268pp. £2.50. 0 14 035083 7. First published 1967), a selection chosen by Lofting's sister-in-law, Olga Fricker, of stories from the original twelve books about the gentle doctor and his animal friends.

BARBARA WILLARD, *The Lark and the Laurel*. 0 356 13169 6. First published 1970. *The Sprig of Broom*. 0 356 13171 8. Illustrated by Alan Marks. First published 1971. 192pp. Macdonald. £2.50 each. The first two of a welcome release of the creative Maudslayi series, following the fortunes of one family through a broad sweep of history. The characters live and toil deep in the forest of Sussex, and though their lives are often shaped by great political events, it is their daily joys and troubles that the reader savours. These are genuine novels: twelve-year-olds who now they have read his logical fiction find themselves surprised. The

next two will be published in May, with the rest following every six months.

CHRISTINA DUNNILL, editor. *A Girl's Best Friend*. 150pp. Livewire. £2.95. 0 7043 4907 8. First published 1987. This is a wide-ranging collection of original short stories (many by new writers, judging from a certain self-consciousness of tone), which set out to examine the different relationships in any girl's life - mother, father, siblings, boyfriend, old people. Many of them deal with cross-cultural pressures, and they portray more pain than rewards, but they speak with the authentic voice of many of today's young people and will appeal to those - perhaps non-readers - who believe books can offer them little to connect with "real" life. (13 and over.)

SAM MCCARTNEY, *Colvin and the Snake Basket*. Illustrated by Carol Holmes. 94pp. Magnet. £1.50. 0 416 04492 1. First published 1985. Colvin Matthews is as rare and wonderful a creation as Little Pale, and deserves to live as long. McBainley is without parallel in his insight into life as seen from the middle of the family sandwich, by an engaging small boy who is in love with his infant teacher and at war with Rosy Tea Cossy, who retires to the laundry basket and hides under the dirty socks when he's miserable, and gives world-beating Rib-squashers and Neckbreakers when he's happy. The spirited humour and affection appeal as much to adult readers as young listeners. (5-8.)

JANE SCHWARTZ, *Caught*. Virago Upstairs. £3.50. 0 86068 949 2. First published 1985. Virago, Upstairs and Livewire (from The Woman's Press) are the two most politically active of the new teenage lists, sharing common ground in themes of growing self-awareness and disillusion. Both lists are firming up after a shaky start, and this American first novel is both elegant and mature. Set in the late 1950s, in the grimy backstreets of Brooklyn, where freedom means the vicarious joy of watching your own stock of pigeons wheeling from the rooftop coops, it is a recollection of the turmoil of prepubescent love and sexuality. Casey, a world-weary thirty-eight, teaches ten-year-old Johnny Louie far more than just how to be the best flyer in this sharply intense novel. (15 and over.)

Two-way traffic

Gavin Ewart

JOHN MOLE
Boo to a Goose
66pp. Peterloo. Paperback, £3.95.
0 905291 90 5

John Mole has written only one book specifically for children - *Once There Were Dragons* - but in the other six books to date there have been poems likely to appeal to younger readers scattered throughout. Even in the collections of "adult" verse there are pieces that are riddles or simple nursery songs - such as, for example "Nobody's Last Words" in *In and Out of the Apple*, a slightly sinister riddle in a book that also contains the sequence "Penny Toys", geared to the lives and expectations of children. It is hard, in fact, to separate the childlike from the childish; and this has always been one of Mole's strengths, as he exploits the two-way traffic between both. Children are as intelligent as adults, and in their chosen subjects well informed. What they lack, naturally enough, is experience of life.

Boo to a Goose is a selection from the whole oeuvre. The little songs can be disturbing. One describes a "cold" and carefree fish:

Yes, we all admired him
As we kept our distance, all
Except one huge and hungry shadow
Leaping from the depths
Which ate him whole.

Death is a presence, though not named; yet all young watchers of television Nature programmes know that she is red in tooth and claw. The distance between the adult and the child is not very great, when it's a question of general menace. The riddles, likewise, and there are fourteen, are as taxing for adults as for children (but perhaps I'm not very good at riddles); the best are very well written:

Grand and solo, polished brightly,
Dance of practised fingers nightly,

Claire de lunar or moonlighty.
Presto, fonce, pathétique,
The world is mine because I speak
A language common yet unique.

"Under the Tree" is a satire on unwanted Christmas presents, that any child would understand:

At least it's not an oven glove
From Cynthia and Ron with love.
Affectionate regards - Aunt Grace
Something she broke and must replace.
The shop will not take this one back
To all of you from Uncle Jack.

Just occasionally there are faults, where the idea of rhyme is stretched a bit (town/frown), or the throwaway line strikes a dead note at the end of a poem - "It is too late" at the conclusion of "The Zebra", where his stripes are compared to prison bars, or "Pike, I wish I had your go", the last, unrhyming, line of a poem which is made of true rhymes and assonances.

In performance, such things can be overcome; and for reading aloud to groups of children these poems are obviously very suitable. They are also, in their way, sophisticated. The Knife-thrower and his bride sing together:

Then as we grow old we'll remember
The marvellous day we first knew
That the thrill of cold steel
Could teach us to feel
Sensations so poignant and true.

Probably the best thing is the lack of whimsy: this is, in most respects, a common-sense, realistic poetry, where skinheads yell "Sod it!" and a girl says "Meet me for a coke in the cafeteria". The final section, "The Big Top" (quoted above), is described as "an entertainment for several voices" and it's not hard to imagine this series of circus poems as a successful performance piece. It's good for children, moreover, to be exposed to words like "cacophony" and "polyphonus" and the hysterical lype of the Circus Master ("that raucous, gallimaufrous razmatazz").

Favourite and Familiar

George Szirtes

There are all too few books of new poems for children so we must be grateful for those that now and then appear, especially those which neither talk down nor play up to their audience. Richard Edwards writes for intelligent and imaginative children. His verse extends the well-crafted humorous line of James Reeves and Charles Causley. The very look and feel of *Whispers from a Wardrobe*, with its slightly Arizona-ish drawings by John Lawrence, suggests something reassuring and steeped in tradition. The poems show many warm, imaginative touches: the status of a naked woman comes to life and takes a dip in the river, a coat-hanger complains inside a wardrobe, two rabbits count daisies. Occasionally we come close to Kit Wright or to Lewis Carroll but the poems establish their own kindly and generous personality. Some have the look of future anthology pieces.

The difficulty of selecting such anthologies is due to the scarcity of previously uncollected work. Colin West has circumvented the problem by dusting down old books of cautionary verse for *The Beginner's Book of Bad Behaviour*. The pitch cornered by Belloc and Hoffmann, and queered by Cyril Fletcher, is shown to extend back into the early years of the nineteenth century. Of course we always knew it was there but it was difficult to find. The effort on the whole has been worth while, though the moral earnestness of the older poems is inevitably undermined by later parody. Children will read this book for laughs, though most of the poems were not written with laughter in mind. That will bother neither the children, nor connoisseurs of the genre.

Anne Dalton illustrates West's other book, *The King's Toothache*, a single short poem in verses framed within double-spread pictures. The king sends his maid down to St Ives to bring back a dentist, but each time she goes she returns with someone who makes the king worse, until a tailor succeeds in curing all his ailments. The twenty-three, well-turned verses are suitably amplified by the vaguely Victorian look of the sweet (but not too sweet)

coloured crayon drawings with just a touch of Sendak.

Two other new anthologies are both intended for very young readers. Sarah Pooley's *A Day of Rhymes* contains many old favourites, and a few less familiar items. The book is a lively piece of design, with bright unpretentious drawings in flat watercolours and thin black line. A jolly, harmonious multicultural society of children is depicted. This book's heart is conspicuously in the right place.

Jack Prelutsky makes a wider sweep of poems and in his collection for the very young we are introduced to Ivy O. Eastwick, Anita E. Posey and Beatrice Schenk de Regniers, among many others. Thematically it is a traditional gamut: there are a lot of animal verses, birthday verses and weather verses. The copious drawings are in gentle aquarelle, softening at the edges, many pages framed in loose patterns, making an excellent book of its kind, a genuine keepsake.

A keepsake more properly deserving of the title is the sumptuous *Crows* by Heidi Holder. This is one of those beautiful Rackham-influenced books that adults will covet. Full-page, detailed drawings in rich colour face the minimal text (oo the lines of "One for sorrow, Two for joy . . .") at each opening. Each page is suffused with its own subtly dominant colour; the drawings of weasels and minks in costume are vigorously romantic though uneasily reminiscent of those taxidermist costume-pieces found in museums. The language of flowers is used throughout and explained at the back. The book is properly precious, a sensuous experience for any child.

Richard Edwards: *Whispers from a Wardrobe*. Illustrated by John Lawrence. Cambridge: Lutterworth. £5.95. 0 7188 2683 3.
Colin West: *The Beginner's Book of Bad Behaviour*. Century Hutchinson. £5.95. 0 09 172120 2.
Colin West: *The King's Toothache*. Illustrated by Anne Dalton. Walker. £5.95. 0 7445 0562 3.
Sarah Pooley: *A Day of Rhymes*. Bodley Head. £5.95. 0 370 31666 7.
Jack Prelutsky (Editor): *The Walker Book of Reading Rhymes for the Very Young*. Illustrated by Mary Brown. £5.95. Walker. 0 7445 0770 7.
Heidi Holder: *Crows: An old rhyme*. £5.95. Simco and Schuster. 0 671 6504 0.

Traditional times

Alan Brownjohn

CHARLES CAUSLEY
Jack the Treacle Eater
Illustrated by Charles Keeping
96pp. Macmillan. £7.95.
0333 42963 X

Whatever else his contemporaries may try, Charles Causley preserves, and enriches, a tradition in children's poetry which holds that the world is a place for innocent surprise and wonder.

In part this is a de la Mare world, where nature, the creatures and human beings are real and recognizable and at the same time cryptic and haunted, where adults hint at and yet withhold the ultimate truths about their motives and their mortality. But Causley's is another generation and background: the 1920s child grew up in the small Cornish cottage with in sight of the moors and the sea (where the poet saw long wartime service) instead of de la Mare's middle-class Kent mansion of corridors, attics and magisterial mystery. His world and his world-view are his own.

His poems have always subtly changed for his own purposes the atmosphere, the details and the techniques employed by the poets whom one suspects he most admires, and in *Jack the Treacle Eater* he continues to ring the changes with undiminished flair and exuberance. It does not matter if there are echoes (a very slight, and wholly beneficent, influence of Edward Lear. A. A. Milne and Old Possum); and there is no reason to cavil at occasional archaisms and inversions if effects work as well as they do in the neatly titled "Count Pollen":

Along the valley floor the stream
Its silver waters drew.
'Is good to be alive!' I said.
'Tchoo! said the Count. A-choo!

Nor does it matter (it can be a very good thing) if many of the tales told in the poems are the stuff of traditional fable and fantasy. Causley's particular skill lies in situating them comfortably in our own world without obtrusive updating, as in his anecdote of two rampaging centenarian lovers who meet behind the Co-op:

Such songs, my love, we used to sing
Till the stars had set their shine,
And the bells of heaven rang ding, ding, ding
And the neighbours rang 999.

He understands, moreover, that the existence of the modern child is still one in which the times of day and the seasons are important.

Some of the best poems in the book use that intuition, which is becoming rarer among poets writing for the young: "Summer was Always Sun", "Twenty-four Hours" and "Jaekie Grimble", about the spirit which tempts him away from his work on a sunny day:

Ah, but Jaekie Grimble
The air is growing nimble,
A white wind is rising
That smells of snow,
Under the green riding
The tall mire is hiding
And the sands are quick
Wherever I go.

This builds a bridge not only between past and present notions of what poetry should be (it has the tripping measure of a sinister MacNeice ballad) but between a child's and an adult's perceptions of weather, and time passing. Its appeal is to the natural intelligence of children on a level which is never patronizing.

A child will relish the play with words and visual images in "The Song of the Shapes" ("Miss Triangle, Miss Rectangle, Miss Circle and Miss Square / Were walking down on Shipshape Shore / To taste the sea-salt air"), appreciate the energy of the ocean in "Mowenston" ("When will you rest, sea? / When moon and sun / Ride only fields of salt water / And the land is done") and work out why the grandmother cannot move in "Photograph":

Firm as a figurehead she stands,
Sees with unsparring eye the thread
Of broken words within my hand
And will not turn away her head.

Jack himself ran messages on foot to and from London for a Somerset landed family in the late eighteenth century, and kept fit by training on treacle. In Charles Keeping's illustrations he runs vigorously, and yet more stiffly than in Causley's lively verses about him. He is characteristic of too many of the pictures in the book, which frequently fail to relax into an easy compatibility with the poems. Mr Zukovsky ("always so sober and neat") is not sufficiently in contrast with his wildly untidy wife, the Guy Fawkes in "Why" is not top-hatted and seems to scare none of the children (children will want these details because the poem mentions them), and Aesop in "Fable" is ugly without suggesting charisma. But happily, the word-pictures in *Jack the Treacle Eater*, which is much the best volume of poems for children since the same author's *Figgie Hobbin* in 1970, are entertaining, vivid and memorable enough for readers to conjure up the subjects for themselves.

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A craze for coonskin caps

Gillian Avery

MICHAEL A. LOFARO (Editor)
The Fall Tales of Davy Crockett: The 2nd
Nashville series of Crockett Almanacs 1839-
1841: Facsimile edition
Happ, Knoxville: Tennessee University Press.
Paperback, \$12.95.
080495259

Writing about British chapbook heroes, Victor Neuburg decided that there were two main types, the "serious" like Robin Hood, Jack the Giant-Killer and Guy of Warwick, and the comic like Simple Simon and Tom the Piper's Son. Popular taste demands a killer or a buffoon, and when comics took the place of chapbooks it was the same - Tarzan and Sexton Blake, Billy Hunter and Ally Sloper. But Davy Crockett, the first American folk hero, combined both elements: he was Superman, an infant Hercules, wearing a whisky mixed with rattlesnake's eggs, whose adventures were sometimes on a comic scale - on one occasion he saved the United States from destruction by swinging the tail of Halley's Comet and flinging it back into space. But he was a superhuman too, cocking a backwoods snook at polished society, and regarded as so funny that Ben Harding, the Man in the Hat, centuries, felt bound to warn readers: "You had best to keep your ribs before you reel 'em, or you will shake out your bowels a falling."

The real Davy Crockett was born in 1786 to a poor family in Tennessee, received a scanty education (his schooling was reckoned only to amount to a hundred days), started work as a

farm-hand when he was twelve, fought against the Indians, got a name as a hunter, storyteller, hustling campaigner and humorist (he defeated an opponent by memorizing the man's speech and getting in with it first). He was elected to Congress in 1827, 1829 and 1831, was defeated in 1835, made his way to Texas and was killed by the Mexicans at the battle of the Alamo in 1836. Even before his epic death he was a popular hero - and not just in his own part of the Southwest. This was partly due to his skills as a raconteur, but also because he stood for rusticity, good blunt horse-sense and lack of book-learning, which many of his countrymen liked to think was what made America strong against the decadent European nations, old in guile. "I ain't used to oily words," Crockett said in a speech in Houston reputed by himself. "I am used to speak what I think, of men, and to men." Political pamphleteers made capital out of what the backwoods down was supposed to have done at the White House (slurping water from his finger bowl, mistaking the purpose of a spittoon, bursting out the waiter who took away his plate); journalists wrote anecdotes, Crockett added his own tall stories to the legend, and the almanac writers and back biographers sprinkled it all lavishly with stories that properly belonged to other less famous characters, and with their own imagination. The Davy who emerged from all this was a loud-mouthed gamecock, a ring-tailed rarer, whose reputation as a sharp-shooter was such that coons would tumble out of trees and give themselves up with folded paws as soon as they heard his name (a story originally attached to another hunter). An 1837 almanac had him addressing Congress in this style:

DAVY CROCKETT, THE
GREATEST FRONTIERSMAN
OF THE WEST, IS RIDING
THROUGH CHEYENNE COUNTRY



Dan Lawrence's comic-strip Davy Crockett, 1937, one of a number of Crockett strips and comics of the period. The picture is reproduced from a comic in the Dicks Gifford Collection; further details can be found in Gifford's *Encyclopedia of Comic Characters* (250pp, Longman, £16.95, 0582 892945).

My father can whip any man in Kentucky, and I can lick my father. I can outstep any man on this floor, and give him two hours start. I can run faster, dive deeper, stay longer under, and come out drier, than any chap this side the big Swamp. . . . I can walk like an owl; run like a fox, swim like an eel, yell like an Indian, light like a devil, and spout like an earthquake. make love like a mad bull, and swallow a nigger whole without choking if you butter his head and pin his ears back.

Richard Dimsen in his account of the Crockett legend describes the Davy popular in the comic almanacs between 1830 and 1856 as representing "frontier crudity, violence, anti-intellectualism, chauvinism, and racism. He butchers the victims of the forests, sneers at book-learning and educated Easterners, despises niggers, Indians, and Mexicans, and triumphantly trumpets the supremacy of Uncle Sam." In the 1870s Americans demanded something different, and Davy paced the Broadway boards in *Davy Crockett: Or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* as a tender, sensitive Young Lochinvar. In one of the more powerful scenes he protects a fainting, frozen maiden against ravaging wolves, and eventually rescues her on her wedding day from a dastardly bridegroom. He still slaughters Indians, but apologetically. Having dispatched forty-two of them he remarks: "I never drew my knife across the throat of one of 'em without a shudder." This melodrama was presented up and down the United States for twenty-four years - and probably would have lasted longer if the actor playing twenty-five-year-old Davy had not died aged fifty-seven. The television age revival of Crockett was ephemeral in contrast. In weekly episodes during 1955 and 1956 Fess Parker portrayed Crockett as a refined and chivalrous Boy Scout, daring, no doubt, and possessed of manic energy, but a serious hero, wiped clean of all humour. Nevertheless, it fitted the mood of the times: the price of yacoon tails reached the level of milk, and in the Manchester suburbs in the mid-1950s you could see small boys parading in coonskin caps and fringed jackets. It was a craze that disappeared as suddenly as it had begun. A film condensatin was nothing like as popular as the original series, and long before the end of the decade all that was remembered of Crockett was the theme song "Davy Crockett, king of the wild frontier", which still went on blaring from the juke-boxes.

The Crockett presented in Michael Lofaro's edition of *The Fall Tales of Davy Crockett* is Davy Mark I, the swingingest braggart, as seen in the second series of Crockett almanacs published from Nashville in his native Tennessee between 1839 and 1841 and shown here in facsimile for the first time, a valuable contribution to the history of American humour. In these accounts of "Adventures, Exploits, Sports and Scraps in the West" we see our hero and his sidekick Ben grappling with buffalo, grizzly bears, wolves and catamounts, and getting the better of Indians, Yakkons, Missagittans and "Methowians". "A face to face confrontation with the brutish, rascally, cunning, and humorous and comic stereotypes that many Easterners

century Americans regarded as funny is a disturbing experience". Lofaro comments. No nation likes to see itself exposed like this, and Dickens was exonerated in the 1840s for presenting America as a race of Davy Crocketts.

The third revised edition of John Rowe Townsend's *Written for Children: An outline of English-language Children's Literature* has recently been published (364pp, Penguin, Paperback, £7.95, 0 14 010688 X). This edition has revised and expanded text, in particular in the section on the post-war period which now has a cut-off date of 1985. The book begins by tracing the history of children's books in three parts, covering "Before 1840", 1840-1915 and 1915-45. In the final section, 1945-85, characterized by Rowe Townsend as "the turbulent years", examines the growth of fantasy, American and British versions of "realism", the teenage novel, Australian children's books and picture books.

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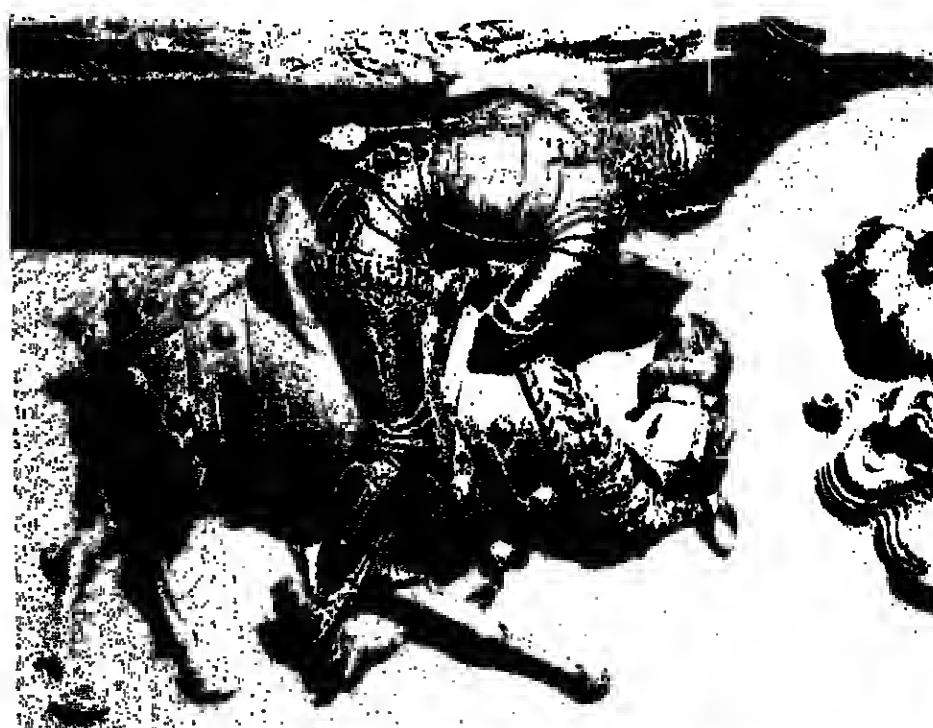
George Henderson

Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England
1100-1400
Royal Academy, until March 6

Over the entrance of the *Age of Chivalry* exhibition at the Royal Academy the exhibition's horse-and-rider logo is shown not once, but three times. This should prepare the visitor for multiplicity, and duplication, inside. There is indeed more than one exhibition going on just now at Burlington House, deeply intermeshed but not always mutually supportive.

One exhibition has a sociological basis, reconstructing thirteenth and fourteenth-century life in terms of personal possessions, weapons, the gear of roys, civic and ecclesiastical ceremonies and various tangible expressions of religious belief. Not only the things that were made for use or show but also the making processes are displayed. The quality of the exhibits drawn together to illustrate art as social action and as craftsmanship is staggering. A psalter leaf illuminated by W. de Brailles is not exhibited for his narrative skill but because he wrote his name on it. The Lambeth Apocalypse is opened at its miniature of a Benedictine monk with a paint-brush in his right hand, applying paint to an acquiescent statuette of the Virgin and Child; in his left hand he holds a dish palette. The artist's activities are vividly realized, alongside, in a limestone statue which bears traces of polychrome, and in a rare surviving oyster-shell palette, still containing red, blue and gold.

Not all the technical exhibits are so imaginatively sustained and rounded out. The Southwick Priory seal matrix is laid out in its separate parts, but an impression of their union, one of the magic moments in thirteenth-century English art, is not provided. There are drawbacks to the lavish use of major artefacts in the contexts of high art, but of sociology and of practical musings and bolts. The first Great Seal of Henry III and the seal of the barons of London are so exhibited, in separate rooms, a dislocation which excellent catalogue entries cannot redeem for the lay visitor. The artistic personality of their designer, Walter de Ripa, and the implications of his style, at that early date, deserve a central place in the chronological survey and reassessment of English Gothic art - another exhibition altogether, which goes on, none too coherently, under the aegis of the accession of Plantagenet kings. The fact that the St Maurice d'Againe ciborium was



Knight falling, a misericord lent by the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral to the Age of Chivalry exhibition reviewed here.

brought to London in 1984 for the exhibition of *English Romanesque Art 1066-1200* (where it was the odd one out) did not at all do away with the need to start the exhibition of English Gothic art, 1200-1400, with metalwork of that level of excellence. Nothing stylistic is made of Robert FitzWalter's seal. The seal and counter-seal of Bishop Jocelin of Wells are markedly absent. Episcopal seals are not allowed into the showcases until the "mid-thirteenth century".

The "stylistic" exhibition begins in Room 3, dedicated to work done in the reigns of Henry III and Edward I. A valuable contribution is made by importing fine English or related wooden sculpture from Scandinavian collections. Following that line, it was an imaginative act to bring to London the fabled Faaberg panel. What a pity that Matthew Paris's manuscripts could not be mustered in greater numbers to meet the challenge. Whereas gaps in the fabric of English thirteenth-century sculpture are usefully filled with works in wood and ivory, the stone sculpture is oddly dispersed. The Virgin and the annunciating angel from the Westminster Chapter House door stand far apart, each with the stark isolation of Elisabeth Frink's political prisoner. The Christ and the doctors relief from Wells Cathedral lost its polychrome long ago, but at Burlington House

it has also lost its three-dimensionality and any sense of its bold geometric frame. In another portion of the "sociological" exhibition, in Room 9, the "Three Fourteenth-Century Psalters" gain life and substance from the things that they had had made. Exhibition policy in Room 3 seems rather to have been to drain Henry III's reign of its achievements. All the great Apocalypses, Trinity, Morgan, Douce (and the Osceit Psalter, for good measure) are placed by the editors of the catalogue in the section devoted to Edward I. It is true, and this only makes it all the more weird, that Edwardian dates are not assigned to these works, with the notable exception of the Westminster Retable, but none the less the urge to get the thirteenth century over is evidently there.

The genuine activities of Edward I are represented by the various records of part of the Painted Chamber, of St Stephen's Chapel and of the memorials to Queen Eleanor. The re-erection of the Queen's statue from the Waltham Cross, flanked by two heraldic plaques from the Cheapside Cross, makes in association with the antiquarian watercolours of these lost monuments one of the creative high points of the exhibition. Creative in another way is the bringing together of the two parts of

the Ramsay Psalter, from New York and St Paul in Lavant. There are many other memorable juxtapositions: the Tickhill, Ormesby and De Lisle Psalters flourish in the glorious company of the Bolognese Cope and the Elizabeth-Leicester giltern. The ripe physical beauty of all these works of art in different media is perfectly consistent.

Items exhibited under the Plantagenet aegis continue to cause the editors of the catalogue trouble. The reasoning behind the section on Edward II (1307-27) in Room 6, which includes photographs of the Percy tomb of 1340 and the king's own tomb, is quite obscure. Edward II's section benefits anachronistically from the life-enhancing heraldic chest of Edward III's High Treasurer, and the supremely dignified and cheerful choir-stalls from Lancaster. Edward III himself is well represented by contemporary likenesses on seals, coins, and wall-painting. The taste and patronage of his grandson Richard I are represented by panel paintings end by a masterly sculpture, the Sutton Veness alterpiece, which shows that perfect liaison between relief-carved figures and their architectural setting, for which English designers had a genius.

In his *Anecdotes of Painting* (1762) Horace Walpole wrote:

During the reigns of the two first Edwards, I find no vestiges of the art, though it was certainly preserved here, at least by painting on glass. No wonder that a proud, walkie, and ignorant nobility, encouraged only that branch which attested their dignity. Their dungeons were rendered still darker by their pride. It was the case of all the arts; none flourished, but what served to display their wealth, or contributed to their security.

Judging from the ideological chapters in the catalogue, it is not quite clear that the organizers of the exhibition think very much better of the patrons of English Gothic art, on the moral plane, than Horace Walpole did. Art is the sunny side of oppression, illiteracy and superstition. Despite much introductory matter, the catalogue lacks the sure historical perception which Simon Keynes and Christopher Brooke brought to the two previous exhibitions, *The Anglo-Saxon "Golden Age"* and *English Romanesque*. There are, however, many workmanlike essays on various branches of art exhibited at Burlington House. The organizers have worked with energy and vision to contradict Horace Walpole's depreciation of the artistic achievements of English Gothic. They display not just the vestiges but the abundance of that art and display it to the fullest visual advantage.

An artist of the new order

Robert Snell

Diego Rivera: A Retrospective
Hayward Gallery, until January 10

In the great mural of his late years, the "Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda", Diego Rivera painted himself as a child in Edwardian dress holding the maternal hand of a skeleton, to the centre of a massive panorama of Mexican history. The adult Rivera look what he needed from his late nineteenth-century, Europeanized upbringing. The Revolution which started in 1910 found him studying in Europe; he returned to post-revolutionary Mexico in 1921, at the age of thirty-four, and experienced a form of rebirth: the Revolution was, for Rivera, a new personal as well as a national beginning. Images of other mothers and children, stay in the mind as among the most moving in the present exhibition; gestation, birth, nurture and growth - strong, gently cupping hands, womb-like spaces, a powerful erotic energy - constitute central metaphors in his work.

Rivera became, "el muy discutido Diego", the most famous, cosmopolitan and hugely prolific member of a group of revolutionary muralists whose task was to help forge, by means of a programme of vast, officially sponsored works, nothing less than a new national myth and identity. It was to be based on a discovery of Mexico's indigenous mural tradition, from pre-Columbian and colonial

pest, and on the culture and aspirations of those rural masses by whom the Revolution had, largely, been fought; Rivera further appropriated to his synthesis the subject-matter of Western science and capitalist industrial production. Thus the metaphor of growth and nurture was extended: industrial pipes and conveyor belts become umbilical, and a foetus is juxtaposed with the machinery of heavy industry. Rivera's synthesis was, by the early 1930s, not only to embrace Mexico: his new industrial imagery was born in Detroit (where, thanks to the Ford Motor Company, the exhibition originates), and was to contribute, as he wrote in 1934, to "the splendid functioning of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics of the American Continent". This was a sincerely held political vision, informed by Rivera's understanding of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and by a recent visit to the Soviet Union; it was also a supreme statement of faith in the power of properly channelled natural and human creativity.

In his excellent *The Murals of Diego Rivera*, published to coincide with the exhibition (103pp, Journeyman Press, £5.95 at exhibition, £12.95 elsewhere, 0 85172 013 8), Desmond Rochfort is right to stress the fundamental unity of Rivera's art and his politics. Neither is a subservient to the other; to complain that Rivera's emotions as a painter made him a less than perfect Marxist is as unhelpful for an understanding of his overall achievement as to write off his painting as merely illustrative propaganda. This is the first Rivera retrospec-

tive to be held outside Mexico since 1951, and the first ever in this country; it is supported by a learned and well illustrated catalogue (*Diego Rivera: A retrospective*, 368pp, Hayward Gallery, in association with W. W. Norton, £15, 0 393 02275 7), thorough chronologies of the Mexican Revolution and Rivera's career, and by a programme of related films and lectures; it includes, to its credit, four full-scale (although hardly true-colour) reproductions of murals from the Ministry of Education in Mexico City. Rochfort's lucid and intelligent book is a further necessary reminder that Rivera cannot properly be known through his easel paintings alone; yet they provide a compelling introduction.

His sensual, affirmative paintings of working and flower-laden Indian women give the closest idea of the colour and tonality of the Mexican murals of the mid-1920s and early 30s; they display the same simplified, decisive outline, attention to profile and clarity of organization; with their weight and monumental dignity, these figures convey a profound sense of belonging, both to the space they occupy, and within a larger whole. The young Rivera was not at his best painting effects of Northern atmosphere; Cubism showed him a way of ordering planes in shallow space and allowing the colours and textures of flesh, fabric and earth to take on lives of their own; this lesson, together with his knowledge of Byzantine mosaics and Italian frescos, later helped him translate his love of mass and palpability into effective images on his walls. Above all, he was,

a superb painter of human movement, learning a great deal from El Greco and Velázquez in Spain (see, for example, "The Old Ones," 1912); this is evident in many of his later female portraits (for example, that of Tina Modotti), and in his painting of women working - although no longer now in the form of movement arrested. The movement embodied here is that of repetitive physical labour; if these peasant women are not caught in fleeing mid-gesture, it is simply because they do not habitually make such gestures.

This is where the exhibition reveals Rivera's greatest strength: his responsiveness to human facts. Indians, mestizos, North Americans, Europeans - each, as an individual and a member of a culture, has his or her own movement, presence, and "style", which can seem almost literally to impose itself on the painting. Rivera played with arte fantástico in the late 1930s, and with pure landscape; yet "style", as when he confronted the ruins of Hitler's bunker in 1956, is always subsumed to a communicative and human purpose; it is not, in itself, an issue. Rivera has had a great influence on committed Western painters since the early 1930s; but he cannot fully be understood in the familiar terms of the history of Western painting. Not only did he belong to a Mexican culture, however "Europeanized" it was; he was also an artist of a new order in world history, the creator, as Rochfort has described it, of "the first great example of a post-colonial art", with all that implies for our Western understanding of what art fundamentally can be.

BEWARE! BEWARE!

Chilling Tales

Compiled by Jean Richardson

A collection of uncanny and disturbing stories about the strange and sinister undercurrents of our daily lives by writers Peter Dickinson, Jan Mark, Berlie Doherty, Jane Gardam, Adèle Geras, Vivien Alcock, John Gordon, Alison Prince and Jean Richardson.



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WILFRID MELLERS
François Couperin and the French Classical
Tradition
Revised edition
526pp. Faber. £27.50.
0571 139833

When Wilfrid Mellers first published this book in 1950, it was a bold venture. After all, Couperin was not then a composer instantly to arouse the very wide interest of which other monographs (Jack Westrup's *Purcell* of 1937, the *Bach Reader* of 1945, Ralph Kirkpatrick's *Scarlatti* of 1951) were assured. Today's early music scene will find many uses for the book, which is only right considering its contribution to that scene's popularity.

Probably the best French critics of 1700 would not have seen François Couperin as quite the leading light of Louis XIV's musical world that some do today: our view of him is coloured by this century's writers (for instance by Arnold Dolmetsch, whose *Interpretation*, republished in 1946, no doubt influenced Mellers) and editors (the Oxford Lyric edition of the 1930s). Nevertheless, he did write some very pretty harpsichord music, some of the best Italian motets and sonatas outside Italy, and a most useful little guide to playing. He had a safer sense of melody than the grander masters (Lully, Marais, Mondonville) and a degree of "harmonic tension" unknown again in France until Berlioz. In 1950, he must have seemed almost on a level with Bach or Scarlatti or Handel, and his world ripe for the describing.

Most of the original text remains in this new version of Professor Mellers's book but more has been added on practical matters, and some of the material is described as "revised to incorporate recent investigations". Faber have done the revision proud in the sheer number of music examples and indeed in totally resetting a book probably longer than it need be. Still

among the valuable parts of the study are the awareness of the better theorists and composers of the day (Mellers is not automatically impressed by either) and a stimulating if brief examination of Couperin's own written remarks. The English taste for opinions is to the fore, but that has advantages, such as ignoring pedantic musicology on, for example, rhythmically inexact notations. The book also reads well.

Stravinsky's readers in 1950 no doubt had great expectations from the word "tradition" in the title, for the brave new WEA world of the late 1940s hoped to see music explained in socially conscious, interdisciplinary terms. But perhaps even musicians now suspect that interdisciplinary is a mirage. Any study in depth is bound to relate to (certain) other disciplines and there is no point in parading this procedure as a subject in its own right. The problem is how to explore that relation in proper depth, to demonstrate - like a Newtonian hypothesis - "saving the phenomena" - exactly how music reflects or is reflected by whatever it is you think relevant.

Now I don't think Mellers ever actually does this. Naturally, the names of Racine, Molière, Watteau and Descartes recur abundantly; but it is hard to know what it all means, or even to see the relevance of the quotations from T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare and Proust or - worse to the point - the many references to Bach (mostly quite unreliable biographically). There is a cloud of, if not unknown, certainly wishful thinking about it all. I do not know who can find this useful:

[Racine's and Molière's] language has not the ceremonial precision of Corneille's, the rhythms are more flexible, the imagery "suggests" more (why the quotation marks?). Just as, in the paintings of Poussin and Champaigne, the precise architecture... the sculptural treatment... are enriched by the sensuously evocative quality of the colour

- and if I did, I would not know what it has to do with Couperin, unless it were used to make a proper point about, say, his phraseology and

its parallels to French metres. But it is not. Explaining history is something one should not beguile writers in 1950, but in 1987 it is misleading to read such historiography as:

Between sixteenth-century polyphony and the classical age, there was a break in England's cultural continuity; and this break has, of course, social and economic causes which are summed up in the phenomenon of the Civil War [italics mine].

Second-year students think that they have reached some kind of truth when they regurgitate this kind of thing, and it is very hard to deal with, not least since many of us are pleased to hear they even know about the Civil War. But finding it in a book that, so to speak, ticks the Couperin market, is not pleasant; there probably will not be another English Couperin study this century.

But Mellers is no more specific and precise even when he tries to be, as in one of the new edition's supplementary sections:

There must be specific parallels not only between musical textures and engraved calligraphy, but also between musical ornamentation and interior decoration... between musical rhythm... and deportment... between musical structures and architectural landscape gardening.

Concrete though these remarks appear, they are still vague. For instance, what is true of musical ornamentation us invoked here that would not be equally true in sixteenth-century England or nineteenth-century Italy? And why "interior"? I do not even understand the point about engraved calligraphy: it cannot mean that movable-type printing produces (encourages? permits? detaches?) French textures of a different kind? Or does it? If so, engraving as distinct from manuscript? Or what? This is the kind of *unwiring* I was referring to: such parallels sound promising but evaporate on examination and leave unexplored those inner relationships we can certainly all feel.

It puzzles me too that socially conscious writers so often seem unconscious of social issues. For example, there is no analysis of how it

came about that the Couperins produced generations of gifted composers. Of course, it is not easy to understand the biochemistry of it; but clearly in a guild-favouring society there were family trades and intermarriage within those trades, and it did not much matter whether the trade was shoe-making or organ-playing. What a grand theme to explore and explain: the idea that skill is "required" in some social contexts, not others. Imagine its implications for those post-Enlightenment notions of genius and Marvellous Boys.

And France itself - in all the cultural talk, where is there here any analysis of the situation in which Parisian musicians found themselves? They engraved and published as no other group of composers had ever before done, supporting Louis's imperialism in so far as they helped to standardize music in a disparate country then in the throes of unification enforced by the Sun King's despotic arm. Would not an interdisciplinary approach help us to understand the passion for specifying such musical details as ornamentation? I know harpsichord ornaments seem a long way from the military machine that Marlborough had to block; but do not rules for ornaments correspond to rules for grammar or spelling, thrusting conventionalization on a very large country (the biggest in Europe), whose nominal ruler claimed catholicity in more ways than one? From a sociological point of view, Couperin's trills are the same as the Parisian Academy's standardized acute accents.

I have to say that there is a lot of dubious musical detail in this book (on Marais and Bach, Carissimi, Italian/French differences, organology), leading one to suspect another problem with interdisciplinary approaches: that there is a temptation to fly above the landscape before the hedgerows are properly plotted. The imprecision and unreliability of detail here, as in his *Bach and the Dance of God*, spoil Mellers's work, and the human touches, horrible though they are, do not compensate.

Follow your Lieder

Eric Sams

J. W. SNEED
German Song and Its Poetry 1740-1900
246pp. Croom Helm. £30.
07099 44071

Song-lovers needed such a book; but they needed it more accessibly priced and written. The hand-drawn music examples look homely. The text is academic and didactic, all mortarboard and blackboard. Some parts earn ticks and alphas; others (such as "elegiac", five times) black marks.

The historical background has been competently filled. We are told why it was so fertile; German-speakers use the same words for their simplest folksongs as for their profoundest poetry. The enterprising bourgeoisie, with their credo of individualistic expression, in art as in life, encouraged a proliferation of printed poems suitable for selling and singing. The native stock of continuous song for voice and bass line was soon hybridized by imported strains. Firm-rooted harmony sprouted florid melody; the Bach chorale was crossed with the barcarolle. Once *vox populi* had become indistinguishable from *vox dei*, the technological developments of piano manufacture, and music-making and marketing in general, made the eventual bumper output of great song-writing seem almost pre-ordained.

In the fields of aesthetic and social history, J. W. Sneed is an informed and insightful observer, and a reliable guide to such agreeable by-ways as the poetry of Hagenedor or the music of Schütz. His book is diligently researched, especially in such aspects as folksong and *Hausmusik*, and ably documented with annotations and bibliography. He could have written the perfect factual introduction to an unfamiliar and rewarding subject. Instead, he abandons his main theme of eighteenth-century song after a hundred pages and tackles topics admittedly beyond his range. So unless the volume is compulsory reading for

whether all his readers will last it.

The first stumbling-block is a tediously insistent style, in which every other point has either already been made, above, or soon will be again, below. Even Chapter One manages to begin "As I have said". Chapter Three, about Austria and Switzerland, announces that "the foregoing account has dealt almost exclusively with Germany", which the more attentive students will already have realized. Extra padding is provided by a reluctance to use one abbreviation where twenty words will do, eg, "there is no better way of illustrating the point I wish to make than by taking...". etc.

Worse still, the occasional sparks of enthusiasm are soon smothered by futile fault-finding. Thus the introductory samples on free offer from the eighteenth century include resoundingly false accentuation, a near-defunct style, melodic lines which would probably sound better as keyboard solos, unvoiced characteristics, an awful octave leap, and so on. No doubt this represents a real intention, even laudable, striving for balance; but it forfeits interest, and indeed leaves the main account in debt. This is the burden, in every sense, of the book's stated theme. We are led up the untrodden paths only to be shown that they are uneven. We are left with the strong impression of a justly neglected genre.

Of course there is plenty of less negative opinion, and indeed much able advocacy. But even in the nineteenth century, the trailer flowerings continue to receive withering comments. Much of this second 100-page section is confessedly otiose. "I cannot hope to add anything substantial to what has already been written" on the leading song-composers, so "I have contented myself with placing them in their historical context", where they were already. The last chapter ventures far beyond the title, because "although I am not expert enough to trace the history of song into the twentieth century, in any great detail, a word or two must be said". Not everyone will see the necessity. All such space should surely be reserved for advertising and displaying genuine goods and real values.

Exploiting the facts

Nicholas Jardine

BRUNO LATOUR
Science in Action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society
274pp. Open University Press. £25 (paperback, £10.95).
0335 153577

In the opening pages of *Science in Action* we meet a Janus-faced science. Its retrospective face, "Ready Made Science", pronounces such conventional wisdom as "Just get the facts straight", "Once the machine works people will be convinced" and "When things are true they hold". Ready Made Science appeals to scientists and their philosophical spokesmen. It allows them to be scientific realists, confidently invoking nature to explain scientific consensus. The prospective face of science, "Science in the Making", voices such insinuations as "Get rid of all the useless facts", "The machine will work when all the relevant people are convinced" and "When things hold they start becoming true". Science in the Making is headed by sociological relativists, subversively appealing to society to explain the closure of debate in science.

Bruno Latour rules out both types of explanation of scientific consensus. Appeal to nature is illegitimate because we have access to nature only through the very consensus we are out to explain. Appeal to society is illegitimate because society is formed and transformed in the process of scientific and technological consensus formation itself. Philosophers of science are let off lightly - Latour proposes a ten-year moratorium on cognitive studies of science. Sociologists of science fare worse - since their whole picture of society as a fixed context in which science is enacted is false, they are, Latour implies, out of business. Thus the author clears the ground for his own enterprise.

The new discipline set out in *Science in Action* is an anthropology of science. Studiously distancing himself from his subjects' own interpretations, the anthropologist of science will follow scientists and technologists at work, bringing to light all the manifold processes through which facts and artefacts are made to prevail. The first part of Latour's book, "From Weaker to Stronger Rhetoric", concerns local fieldwork. Posing as an isolated dissenter, the investigator works his way back from published facts through the rhetorical devices of "writing-up" to the ultimate source of authority: the laboratory. He realizes that it takes a lab to beat a lab. The fieldwork of Part Two, "From Weak Points to Strongholds", ranges more widely. Shadowing the lab boss, the investigator now learns the Machiavellian means by which resources are mustered and mobilized, and allies and retainers enrolled, controlled and delegated. In Part Three, "From Short to Longer Networks", the intrepid anthropologist reaches the central mystery of science, its capacity to accumulate knowledge and power. The whole world is now his field as he tracks the expeditions and probes which bring back specimens and data to "centres of calculation" and charts the ways in which those centres achieve domination at a distance through the processing, replication and dissemination of texts and images.

The first part of *Science in Action* builds on the now very substantial body of studies of scientists at work pioneered by Latour and S. Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* (1979). For all its wit and flair, it would be easy to misconstrue the rest of the work as a fantasy. Such misconception is encouraged by the twists and turns of the plot and by the use of case histories that are either overtly fictional or, like Galileo's notorious experiments in his *Dialogue* concerning the Two Chief World Systems, simplified and built up for didactic purposes. To appreciate the solidity and coherence of Latour's enterprise, *Science in Action* should be read alongside his major venture into social history, *Les microbes: guerre et paix*, and his collection of philosophical aphorisms and meditations, *Irreductions* (translations into English of which are forthcoming). In the grim world of *Irreductions*, games of diplomacy are played out between "actants" - humans, machines, or natural beings - who seek through the enrolment and control of allies, representatives and

delegates to enlarge their spheres of influence. For Latour the fascination of laboratories and "centres of calculation" lies in the heterogeneity of the actants that they ally themselves with in order to dominate the world. Such heterogeneous associations are "refreshing" because they "play havoc with any definition of society or nature by unexpectedly tying microbes with God, heat with Academies, and flasks with commission reports". Add to this list Pasteur and his laboratory, the farmers, the hygienists, the statisticians, the civil and military doctors and their patients, and you have the leading players in *Les microbes: guerre et paix*. Here Latour charts the reception and appropriation of Pasteur's techniques of inoculation, right through from his first work on anthrax to the adoption of Pasteurian methods throughout the French empire. This unprecedentedly detailed and subtle analysis of the machinations of consensus formation lends substance to Part Two of *Science in Action*; and it augurs well for Latour's ability to carry out the ambitious programme of research into the dynamics of scientific and technological progress that he outlines in Part Three of the work.

Latour has good fun at the expense of sociologists of science, but his attack on them is perhaps a bit unfair. Contrary to the impression he conveys, there are precedents in the sociology of science for rejecting views of scientists as passive occupants of pre-existing social categories and for emphasizing the ways in which they perform and create social roles - an outstanding example is Michael Lynch's recent *Art and Artifact in Laboratory Science*. Further, if one compares *Science in Action* with another recent work, Horry Collins's *Changing Order*, perhaps the most cogent statement of the relativist approach to the sociology of science that Latour is out to discredit, one finds a surprising amount of common ground. There is the same concern to trail scientists and technologists at their places of work, the same recognition of local flexibility in interpretation of rules and protocols, and the same interest in the social mechanisms that limit interpretative licence and hence allow controversies to come to an end. For all his threats to defect to anthropology Latour remains in practice a sociologist.

Where the attack on sociology is evidently an inside job, the attack on the epistemology of science seems more a case of smash-and-grab. Epistemologists (and the scientists they represent) are charged with two main offences: they postulate a "Great Divide" between the rationality of scientists and the irrationality of ordinary and primitive persons; and they illegitimately appeal to truth, to a correspondence between belief and nature, to explain scientific consensus. They are at once scientific rationalists and scientific realists. Latour's main target is a type of explanation that does indeed commit the explainer to both these positions. On the assumption that adherence to the rational methods of science is the only way to get at the truth about nature, consensus among scientists is explained by appealing to their adherence to scientific methods. Though Latour's irritation at such facile and complacent explanations is understandable, his running together of scientific realism and scientific rationalism is seriously misleading. Such notable scientific rationalists as Imre Lakatos have had little time for scientific realism. Moreover, for realists of the currently most fashionable sect, the "causal realists", what matters for the success of science is not that scientists should adhere to a canon of rational methods, but simply that there be reliable causal processes connecting states of affairs "out there" with the consensus about those states of affairs achieved by scientists. Replicants of this persuasion are likely to welcome Latour's lively attack on rationalism on the grounds that reliability of methods and procedures is always a contingent matter. Further, they may well see much of Latour's enterprise as complementing their own. Where others have rarely tried to follow the paths to consensus further than the scientists' own labs and immediate surroundings, Latour presses on all the way from the first glimmerings of facts in instrument readings to their eventual enshrouding in history books. The causal realist will have his work cut out converting Latour's enrolments and betrayals, translations and appropriations into reliable causal processes. However, given the

cogency of Latour's stories, that is a challenge he may well have to accept.

The crux of Latour's attempt to dislodge epistemology is the account of the accumulation of knowledge and power at centres of calculation that he offers in the final chapter of *Science in Action*. Here we find that the roles customarily assigned by epistemologists to theory and data have been reversed. Instead of treating data as means employed by competing scientists for supporting and attacking theories, Latour conceives of theories as the means employed by competing centres of calculation for simplifying and combining the "inscriptions" - descriptions, maps, graphs, plans, tables - that enable the centre to dominate the surrounding world and its inhabitants. Before bowing out gracefully the epistemologist may ask how such inscriptions enrol and control their recipients. After all, if their persuasive powers depend on their predictive adequacy, or on their capacity to confirm or refute ex-

perimentally emphasizes flexibility of interpretation and the "translations" whereby readers assimilate texts to their own expectations and appropriate them for their own purposes. Like Juss and Iser, Latour is much concerned with the effective powers of "scenes", whether staged, portrayed or framed in narrative. All of this suggests that what he needs if he is to oust epistemology is an aesthetics of reception of scientific texts and images.

Despite his reception-theoretical stance, Latour might well resist the proposal. Concerned as he is not to exaggerate the distinction between human and non-human agents, he constantly plays down the role of the mind in technology and science; but a full-blown aesthetics would bring back the mind with a vengeance. A further obstacle has to do with the standpoint of the investigator. Latour aspires to the status of a Martian anthropologist at a maximum conceptual distance from the warring tribes he studies. But the narrative standpoint of much of *Science in Action* is near to that of the boss. The quest starts off with an isolated dissenter, but as in folk-tales the hero finds it necessary to become a power. The reader is soon happily in collaboration with the dominant scientist concerned to control the interpretative licence that his followers and allies may take. This is not far removed from the liberal ethos of the aesthetics of reception. However conditioned they may be by tradition, culture and education, the readers who figure in reception theory enjoy an enviable freedom from coercion by authors and their minions.

This duplicity in his narrative standpoint is symptomatic of more general equivocation in Latour's attitude to the exercise of power. In *Science in Action* he justifies the pervasive militarism of his language as a recognition of the close links between science and military technology. In *Irreductions* he insists that his metaphysics of "actants" is to be distinguished from "the warrior myths of Nietzsche", because some of his actants are non-combatants. These apologies lack conviction. The replacement of the debased organic metaphors of the history of ideas - growth, dissemination, decay - with bright new military terminology is both systematic and a natural consequence of an underlying Nietzschean world-picture.

Equally disturbing is Latour's ambivalent response to relativism. In so far as they expose scientific objectivity, rationality and truth as masks and emblems of power, Latour is evidently in full sympathy with relativist sociologists of science. But also, "they stop travelling here, basking in the contemplation of everyone's innocence". What is the harsh conclusion about truth and rationality that relativists are supposedly too nice to draw? It cannot be just that truth and rationality are discredited as explanatory notions, for that is a conclusion that relativists share with Latour. It seems that the realization from which they shrink is that truth and rationality are constituted by victory in battle.

Of course, not all versions of this doctrine are genuinely fearsome. Pragmatism of more harmless kinds is resurgent in philosophy these days, and there are many who would identify truth and rightness with ultimate victory in some hypothetical unbiased arena - an ideal conversation in which all interested parties are represented and have a say, or an open-ended, disinterested and bottomlessly funded scientific inquiry. There can be little doubt, however, that Latour has in mind victory in the unfair contests of the actual world. One may well sympathize with his refusal to choose between a complacent scientific realism and a condescending sociological relativism; but there must be a better way out.

His ominous metaphysics aside, one cannot but be impressed by the scope of Latour's work. Social and institutional history of science, science policy studies, ethnographical studies of scientists and technologists at work, the histories of technology, commerce, warfare and exploration, analysis of scientific discourse, even citation indexing - all have their places. This is no mere *bricolage*, but a coherent and powerful framework for research. I predict that *Science in Action* will have an impact comparable to that of Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* both as a provocation to philosophers and as an inspiration to sociologists and historians of science.



A Swiss hygrometer, circa 1785, reproduced from Early Scientific Instruments, Europe 1400-1800 by Anthony Turner (320pp. Philip Wilson. £55. 085667 3196).

THE TIMES Private Perelman



Screenwriter to the Marx Brothers, award-winning humorist, television personality, Sidney Joseph Perelman led a private life as complex and perverse as his writing. Next Thursday in *The Times* (the paper of which Perelman became a devoted reader), Peter Ackroyd reviews a new biography of the master of parody

... and regularly in *The Times*, Bernard Levin on the way we live now, David Miller on sport, Jane MacGillivray on wine, Geoffrey Smith on politics, Susan Crawford Poole on travel, Clifford Langley on the Church, Philip Howard on words, the unique *Times* crossword... and a new daily game to test your vocabulary: Word-watching

THE TIMES
A lion among paper tigers (25p)



Specialist issues

Literature

Research in African Literatures
Volume 18
\$18. University of Texas Press, Box 7819,
Austin TX 78713.

It may be that there are "already too many little magazines and academic journals in existence, more than any of us can read or subscribe to, even in our own disciplines". This is how Sheila Roberts opens a review of a new English-language journal from an Africanist university in the spring 1987 issue of *Research in African Literatures*. The new journal sounds all too superfluous, indeed. But where else might such a publication be knowledgeably noticed? More important, where else would such a notice be found justified by reviews of Volume Four of the *Unesco General History of Africa*, trapezes of the third conference of African linguists held in Cologne in October 1982. John Collins's *Monarchs of West Africa* (1985) and Monica Wanambi's *Thought and Technique in the Poetry of Okot p'Niek* (1981)? These are only five of the twenty-two reviews which – as usual in this journal – make up close on half the contents.

Since it was founded by Bernth Lindfors in 1970 as the official journal of the African Literature Association and the African Literatures Division of the Modern Languages Association, *Research in African Literatures* (published quarterly) has provided a remarkably comprehensive and varied reviews section, supplemented on occasion by research reports and bibliographies.

Its scope has always been broad, with the editor inviting scholarly or critical contributions in English or French on "all aspects of the oral and written literatures of Africa". It was ahead of its time in insisting that the study of African literatures inevitably included the oral and performance dimension. Two of the four articles in the spring 1987 number – somewhat superfluously entitled "Special issue on Literature and Society" – reinforce this assumption. David Coplan's extended opening essay, on the "Narrative Songs of the Basotho Migrants" of southern Africa, is a splendid example of how thorough and sympathetic basic research has provided the impetus for a redefinition of criteria in response to African literatures. Analysing in detail the overt themes as well as

implicit cultural resonances of a number of Sotho *lifa* (travellers' songs), Coplan shows how the alienation and contradictions of migrant experience are resisted by this continuing and vital cultural form. Sotho herdhows who find themselves "foreign natives" in South African nine compounds hear the *lifa* poet sing that their lives are everywhere and that "Vagabonds are God's Creatures", while they are also reminded of the mischievous activities of their popular village spirits such as the *thokolani* – breknig pots, urinating in the beer and cupulating with sleeping married women, as is his wont.

Jeff Opland's account of the "foremost living poet in the Xhosa language", D. L. P. Yali-Munisi, by contrast, offers an analysis and the barest of cultural contexts, yet does at least present two oral works and one written (in the original and translated, with notes). On October 26, 1976, in the stadium in Umtata, before thousands of people gathered to celebrate the "independence" of the Transkei, Munisi introduced his chief, Manzezulu, by praising his height in several metaphors before calling him "a towering firmer, a tree with no branches/ For he's a chief of destitutes", his people ground down by the English, brushed aside by the Afrikaners, years before. Only simplistic readings of the South African situation can ignore this kind of cultural production, while



An illustration by the white South African artist Cecil Skotnes, reproduced in the spring 1987 issue of *Research in African Literatures*.

promoting, for example, the "protest" verse of urban black writers.

The southern African emphasis (reinforced by Cecil Skotnes's illustrations) continues in David Attwell's attempt, not entirely convincing, to suggest that, in *Chaka*, the Zulu writer Thomas Mofolo was "engaged in a task of historical and cultural diagnosis". Rejecting "psychoanalytic" interpretations of the role of Isanusi in that novel on the grounds that such notions "would have been strange" to Mofolo hardly justifies importing fashionable modern (and, of course, European) notions of Marxist historical and cultural analysis – fruitful as the latter may seem to prove. This strategy is becoming very familiar: it is usually less naively signposted.

Danjan Opat's short essay in defence of Okot p'Niek's tragic killing of the young lad himself, in *Things Fall Apart*, opposes all European notions of the hero's culpability by arguing, with a chilly logic, that although Okot may have shown "some temporal sense of moral revision", he "cannot thereby be said to have committed any offense against Earth". Perhaps not; Chinua Achebe's classic seems the smaller, for this insight into the rules which operate in his characters' dealings with the gods. Is this the best current Nigerian criticism? That seems unlikely, but future issues of *Research in African Literatures* could well help us to find out what is.

The Massachusetts Review: A quarterly of literature, the arts and public affairs
Volume XXVIII
\$12 per year. Memorial Hall, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003.

In the 1860s a visiting Snuthemer, John W. Burgess, found Amherst – the home of the *Massachusetts Review* – "somewhat provincial", but went on to add that it was "sound to the core, educated, refined and at times approached brilliancy". This schoolmasterly verdict could occasionally be delivered with equal justice on individual numbers of the present-day *Massachusetts Review* (though it would be unfair to represent it generally in such condescending terms). The issue for spring 1987 stands as a fair example of its general quality and scope. Refinement extends from the elegantly illustrated cover showing beautiful letters from an Alphabet by Jan Israel de Bry, to the exquisite sixteenth-century *cal des lampes* scattered throughout the handsomely produced text. Such superficial decorum may raise suspicion in some readers' minds, but there is enough soundness – both scholarly and moral – to satisfy any critics who might share John Burgess's tastes.

Unlike many contemporary literary magazines that have found the lure of new critical theory irresistible and overwhelming, the *Massachusetts Review* still subscribes to a liberal eclecticism, providing generous amounts of space for specialized essays by political scientists, social historians and economists. In recent years these have included Neal Salisbury on "The Colonizing of Indian New England", William H. Chafe on "Sex and Race: the Analogy of Social Control", Kenneth M. Dolbear on "Alternatives in the New Fascism", and several articles on the history and situation of various groups of women.

It could be argued, of course, that pieces like this also indicate a certain New England provincialism, euphemistically defended by another contributor as "a valorisation of local history", but they are nicely balanced by more broadly based, if no less earnest, essays on such subjects as (in the spring issue) the cultural responsibility of academic critics, and the life of one of Tolstoy's disciples, Mary Alexandrovna; also a fascinating fragment of Mork Nepo's epic poem on the life of Michelangelo, illustrated by a Leonardo da Vinci sketch and a fine photograph of Michelangelo's statue of Moses. There is more than a trace of brilliance, too, in Joe Straub's story, "The Gioconda Aria", even if his singing dwarf from Duluth does evoke too many echoes of Günther Grass's Oskar Matzerath.

Individual issues often give the impression of having been thrown together rather haphazardly, and lack the focus that could have been supplied by a firmer editorial vision. Like other regionally based magazines in the United States that have refused the embrace of a heady postmodernist culture, this journal appears to be trapped in the aura of ghostly presences, unable to claim a unique territory for itself. Just as the *Southern Review* finds it difficult to escape the confines of Yoknapatawpha County and the influence of the Southern Agrarians, the *Massachusetts Review* sometimes seems destined to live for ever in the shadow of the Boston Brahmins. This is even true of some of the special issues such as that on New England, which is dominated by Robert Frost and Henry James. On the other hand, recent special numbers – "Women: The Arts", comprising one of the better surveys in what is becoming a very crowded field, and the double issue on Latin America – are excellent. In the latter the editors have taken the trouble of having the superb colour reproductions – of drawings by Llonel Góngora and sculptures by Margarita Azúria – printed separately at the Oxford Press. Not only does the number include work by Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Mario Vargas Llosa and Mario Benedetti, but also a wealth of excellent imaginative writing and social commentary by artists and scholars who deserve to be better known outside their own countries. As one in point is the Chilean poet Enrique Lihn, who during the past twenty years has published seventeen volumes of poetry which, even in translation, demonstrate a major talent. "Alice in Wonderland" – a terrifying inversion of Victorian values – "Antics of blood between these paths and

– leaps directly out of his own culture and subjects ours to a searching, critical examination. In publishing work of such quality, the *Massachusetts Review* shows how it might expand its dimensions and become a literary magazine of some significance.

Brian Lee

Sewanee Review
\$12 per year. Sewanee TN37375-4009.

Founded in 1892 and thus the oldest literary quarterly in America, the *Sewanee Review* consciously continues the critical tradition of the Southern wing of the New Criticism. Poets and critics of the 1920s such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, who were polemicists in the agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), and later powerful figures in the "republic of letters", have significantly shaped the writing and reading of fiction and poetry over the past half-century (although their influence was perhaps felt most in the 1940s and 1950s).

The New Criticism's method of close textual analysis was often but not inevitably linked with political conservatism. In approaching the literary text (the "verbal icon"), New Critics dismissed concern with authorial intention, the community of readers or the historical context of literature as irrelevant. This needs mentioning, since such a critical approach would seem to promise little excitement for those whom George Core, editor of the *Sewanee Review*, calls "members of the polity of letters".

During his tenure of thirteen years, however, Core has broadened the purview of the New Critical approach and made the *Sewanee Review* into a quarterly devoted to a general way to the central figures and concerns of Anglo-American modernism. Despite its provenance, there is relatively little focus on modern Southern literature, though the bias towards American rather than English literature and letters. The *Sewanee Review* represents the New Criticism turned retrospective, even nostalgic, if that latter term can be stripped of most of its pejorative associations.

As with most literary quarterlies, the *Sewanee* devotes about one-third of each issue to fiction and poetry, generally of the academic modernist variety. Feature essays are sometimes organized around a central concern such as "Postmodern American Poetry", "The New Yorker", "Modernism", "Autobiography", "The Age of Plato". In addition, each issue contains both short and long book reviews. A recent feature is a series called "The Critics Who Have Made Us". As expected, Tate, Warren, Randall Jarrell, R. P. Blackmur and Ezra Pound have been included. But so have one-time rivals such as Lionel Trilling and Philip Rahv from the New York scene, while British critics such as F. R. Leavis, William Empson, L. C. Knights and even George Orwell have also been profiled. Noticeably absent from this collection of approved critics are any structuralist or poststructuralist critics; nor is any Marxist granted canonical status. Most contributors who take pot-shots at poststructuralism in the *Sewanee Review* rarely sound as though they've done their homework, however. They attitudinize rather than analyse. George Watson in the summer 1985 issue is glib to assert that much critical theory "smacks of convenience foods... easy to cook and serve, but dearly bought at the price". (Who can he have in mind?) On the other hand, the contributions of O. B. Hardison and James Applewhite to the "Modernism" issue (summer 1986) are helpful. They essay an evaluation of modernism without trying to score points and succeed in breaking out of the tight Anglo-American literature/criticism nexus. In confronting visual arts and architecture, music and technology, they present a portrait of modernism that seems more variegated than the one derived from Eliot, Pound and Allen Tate.

In summary, the *Sewanee Review* represents the mainstream – become critical backwater. Though George Core insists that it is not an academic quarterly, the vast majority of his contributors are academics. This shouldn't make a difference to anyone, but the fact that it does to Core indicates the way that the New Criticism needs to be embellished, even if it has moved over the past half-century from the avant-garde to the derriere. Richard King

Politics

International Affairs
Volume 63
£20 per year. Butterworth Scientific Limited,
Westbury House, Bury Street, PO Box 63,
Guildford GU2 5BH, for the Royal Institute of
International Affairs.

The World Today
Volume 43
£20 per year. Royal Institute of International
Affairs, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y
4LE.

The Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House was founded in 1920 and has been unchallenged ever since as the foremost British organization in the field. According to its Royal Charter, it is precluded from expressing an opinion on any aspect of international affairs. Instead, it is supposed merely to "encourage and facilitate the study of international questions and to promote the exchange of information, knowledge and thought on international affairs". Nevertheless, Chatham House – like, say, the BBC World Service – has developed a certain identity over the decades and it is probably fair to say that the books and pamphlets produced under its auspices rarely reflect views so radical as to be anathema to Whitehall. And, for good or ill, this respectability and "soundness" are generally reflected also in the articles which appear in its two journals.

International Affairs, established in 1922 and published quarterly, is currently edited by John Roper, the eminently "safe" former SDP MP, who doubtless sees himself as both a committed Atlanticist and a good European. The editorial advisory board contains such establishment luminaries as Roy Jenkins, Sir Michael Palliser and Sir Ian Gilmour. By contrast, Thatcherites and Kinnockites are, to say the least, under-represented on the editorial board and likewise among the major contributors to the journal. Hence foreign readers may get the impression that nothing much has changed in the British way of looking at the world and that the polarization demonstrated in the recent general election was somehow an illusion, or at least no more than a temporary aberration. But perhaps that is what foreigners are supposed to think.

The first two issues in the current volume contain articles on international economic themes by Lawrence Freedman, Edmund Dell and Robert M. Cutler; John Plender of the *Financial Times* discusses London's "Big Bang"; and Roderic Lyne of HM Diplomatic Service contributes a measured and cautious evaluation of Mr Gorbachev's public diplomacy. A couple of licensed critics of Western arms control policies, Jane Sharp and J. P. Perry Robinson, write about the aftermath of the Reykjavik summit and about chemical disarmament respectively. Norman Dombey of *The Times*, "Becoming a non-nuclear weapon state Britain, the NEPT and safeguards", focuses on the interesting if narrow issues that would arise for a Kinnock government as a result of Britain being defined as a nuclear weapon state under the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (whose amendment is held to be "virtually impossible"). Otherwise, however, the prospect of Mr Kinnock in Number Ten is treated with what Lord George-Brown used to call "a complete ignorance". Would American journals in the field adopt a similar "business-as-usual" approach if either of their major parties had become as radical as the British Labour Party? The answer is surely no.

Where *International Affairs* scores heavily in comparison with its American rivals, however, is in its Book Reviews section. Every issue deals with between seventy and one hundred new publications, admirably organized under country subject and geographical categories. A large army of reviewers regularly supply by far the best survey of current literature in the field. Moreover, the reviewers themselves and the books chosen for review reflect a much wider spectrum of interests and opinions than is usually found in the journal's major articles. *The World Today*, a monthly founded in 1964, is a lighter publication, and likely to appeal primarily to the non-specialist looking for a brief survey of current events. Those

of various contemporary international issues, as seen by the kind of "safe" experts to whom Chatham House would instinctively turn. Such readers, however, might be wiser to rely primarily on a weekly like the *Economist* or even the quality Sunday newspapers, for a monthly with the title *The World Today* is something of a contradiction in terms. Moreover, some of its articles appear to be not one but several months behind events. In short, it tends to fall between two stools in being neither a full-blown scholarly journal nor a periodic giving immediate coverage of current events.

David Carlton

Psychiatry

Psychological Medicine: A journal for research in psychiatry and the allied sciences
Volume 17
£48 per year. Cambridge University Press, The
Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road,
Cambridge CB2 2RU.

Seventeen years have passed since the inception of *Psychological Medicine* and the journal (which is published quarterly) has proved its worth. Still under the helmship of its founder, Professor Michael Shepherd of the London Institute of Psychiatry, *Psychological Medicine* has become an established, independent organ of consistent and impressive standard. This attests to the position held by Shepherd on the subject of psychiatry, namely, that it is a clinical branch of medicine and thus firmly embedded within the medical tradition, but also one linked closely to a range of basic sciences – biological, psychological and social. Furthermore, empiricism is pre-eminent in the development of clinical psychiatry and its related basic sciences.

This approach is evident in the articles published. For the most part they are reports of original research in which the emphasis is on rigorous, scientific methodology. Recent issues have included articles on research into neuroendocrine aspects of depression, psychological correlates of severe heart disease, subtyping of schizophrenia, the genetics of schizophrenia, thyroid dysfunction in Mongolism, and memory and brain changes in alcoholism. If there is a tendency towards the biological sciences, this is probably because of the greater volume of original research being done in this sphere of psychiatry.

Other topics are regularly covered. The epidemiology of mental illness is especially well represented, perhaps reflecting Shepherd's own interests (he is Professor of Epidemiological Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry). Some interesting reports have appeared recently on psychiatric illness in an Italian general practice, in a rural community in northern Spain, and in a group of Australian children who had lived in an area devastated by bush fires.

The history of psychiatry is accorded a special place, a rather unusual feature for a general psychiatric journal. It is most refreshing to turn from a series of often specialized scientific articles to such subjects as the adolescence of a thirteenth-century visionary nun or the relationship of demonic possession to mental illness in medieval and early modern Europe. These historical papers are invariably written with impressive scholarship.

Apart from the original articles, there are two other regular sections – book reviews and editorials. The extended book reviews are always of interest, the short notices less satisfactory. How the unnamed reviewer can do justice to one or more books (on occasion six or seven are reviewed as a group) in a few lines is beyond me, and even more so when the views expressed are exceptionally critical in nature. In this context one may note an antipathy, even a downright hostility on occasion, to the whole area of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. (*Psychological Medicine* is not the journal to turn to for articles on the subject of psychotherapy, for they are conspicuous by their absence.)

Finally, the editorials – usually three in number – are a welcome feature. Invited contributors, experts in their field, tackle their topics with relish and insight. The *British Journal of Psychiatry* could well follow *Psychological Medicine* in this regard. Those psychiatrists

who were sceptical about the prospect of a new journal in 1970 will be obliged to concede that after seventeen volumes *Psychological Medicine* has added substantially to British (and international) psychiatry.

Sidney Bloch

History

Enlightenment and Dissent
£4.50 per year. Martin Fitzpatrick,
Department of History, University College of
Wales, Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 3DY.

Joseph Priestley and Richard Price were the leading lights among those eighteenth-century Rational Dissenters who believed in the invincible progress of truth through argument and publication. They would thus have been gratified, but perhaps hardly surprised, to find appearing in the mid-1970s the *Priestley-Priestley Newsletter*, set up by two enthusiasts from the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth, Martin Fitzpatrick and D. O. Thomas. Consistently with their own creed, these philosophical radicals would have expected the happy transformation of the newsletter in 1982 into a full-scale journal, published annually, and also indeed its subsequent blossoming (for this Priestley would have pointed to Providence; more secular mortals would wish to extend heartfelt thanks to the founding editors and their unquenchable enthusiasm).

All scholars have agreed upon the seminal importance of Rational Dissent in the making of the English radical tradition, through its championing of civil liberties and free speech. Surprisingly few, however, have troubled to

investigate its gospels and gatherings in any detail. For that reason, *Enlightenment and Dissent* has played an invaluable role under its two titles over the past decade in nursing the field, publishing not just articles and reviews but documents and news as well.

Price and Priestley themselves have remained the centrepieces. The 1983 issue saw a major reassessment by D. O. Thomas of Price's views on the poor, while his moral and theological opinions found good coverage in the 1986 number. For his part, Priestley had the whole of the 1983 issue devoted to him, to mark the 250th anniversary of his birth, and since then we have been treated to reassessments of his utilitarianism and religious philosophy of history. Yet the broader aspects of radicalism have not been neglected, and it is pleasing to see English Jacobinism receiving analysis here not just as incendiary but as ideology, as in Geoffrey Gallop's welcome revision of John Thelwall in No 5, 1986 – which issue also includes "A few observations on David Hume and Richard Price on miracles" (H. S. Price), "The epistemological strategy of Price's 'Review of morals'" (John Stephens) and "Matthew Tindal on perfection, positivity and the life divine" (Stephen N. Williams). One hopes Godwin will come under the microscope.

Whether such a beast as the English Enlightenment ever existed is still a bone of contention. This admirable journal is helping to settle the question in the affirmative.

Roy Porter

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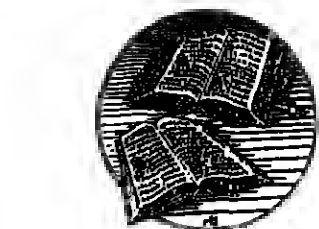
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1945-PRESENT

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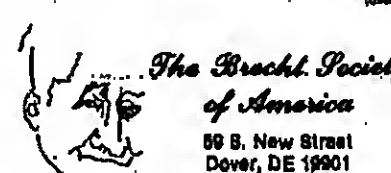
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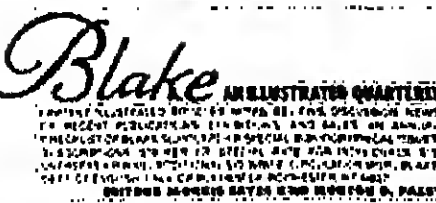
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could not be admitted publication. But that too could be fixed. Pound and one of his recently discovered Imagists, Richard Aldington, were signatories to a letter from five self-styled members of letters who contributed to the Journal — the others were Allen Upward, Huntly Carter and Reginald W. Knauffman — requesting a change of name for the Journal because its current one had failed to communicate its "character... as an organ of both sexes, and of the individualist principle in every department of life." The Poundian hierarchy, one might say, was becoming rigid, and Maudson should have realized from this transience of masculine opinion that this was about to be thwarted. But instead she called a meeting of shareholders to discuss the proposal, (telling them that the current title "continues to suggest what the paper is not, and fails to give any indication whatever as to what it is"). The motion was a unanimous vote in favor of a change of name. And so it is to demonstrate that women would no longer mismanage the Journal. Maudson was

But Hemingway has here internalized Pound's own view of such literary relationships, and consequently ignores alternative perceptions of it. John Coomes, for example, had some misgivings about Pound's habit of "onsexing" people he thought worthless. Those who knew their place were treated by Pound with seemingly boundless generosity, but those who did not (like Amy Lowell) suffered the indignities of his ridicule and contempt. Amy Lowells was very fat, and although Pound liked women, he didn't like fat women: "This dumpy woman" is the Byronic epigraph to his poem; "L'Homme Moyaen Sensuel." He and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska joked at the prospect of Amy Lowell in the nude (*Canio 77* recollects Gaudier-Brzeska with his sculptor's eye on her "elfurid miss"). But Lowell, like Pound, was an American in London, and therefore potentially ally in the struggle against American philistinism. She also had money, which Pound had in common with her.

1. Hark! the numbers soft and clear, 1
 Gently steal upon the ear;
 Now, louder; and yet louder rise
 And fill with spreading sounds the skies.

1. A'rounds to entrancing the angels dancing
 And out of their trance into time again,
 And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
 And those who dwell in the regions of pain.

3 I dreamed I saw a little brook
Run rippling down the Strand;
With cherry-trees and apple-trees
Abloom on either hand;
The sparrows gathered from the squares,
Upon the branches green;
The pigeons flocked from Palace-yard,
Afresh their wings to preen.
Thomas Aske, "A Vision of Children"

Zhang's Zhuk's novel *The Mushroom Picker* will be published in the New Year.

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Archaeology

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Ravalland, Michael, Magnus Larsson and Kristian Kristiansen, editors. *Culture and Ceremony in the Ancient World* (New Directions in Archaeology). Cambridge UP, 155pp., illus. £23. 0 521 33244 9. 11/1/87.

Architecture

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